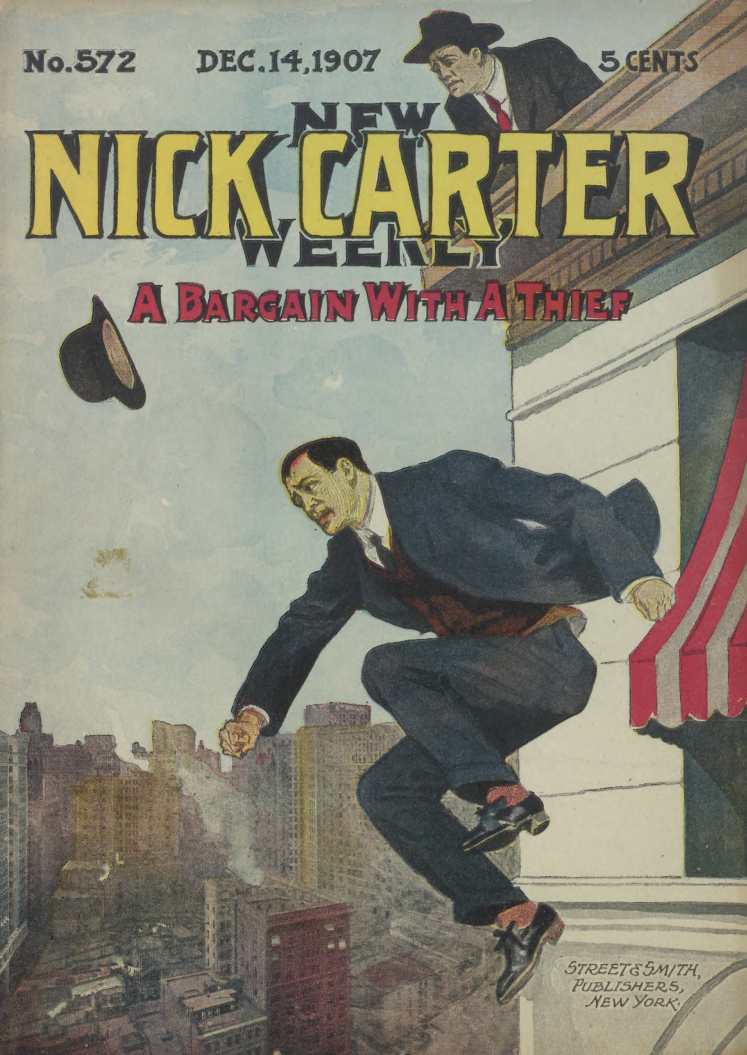
No. 572 DEC. 14, 1907 5 CENTS

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

A BARGAIN WITH A THIEF



STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

No. 572. NEW YORK, December 14, 1907. Price Five Cents.

A Bargain With a Thief;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S WILDEST CHASE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

MULVANEY MAKES A CALL.

"Mr. Robert Moran!" announced Joseph, opening the library door in Nick Carter's house and stepping aside to permit the caller to pass him.

The detective, who was seated there with Chick and Patsy, rose at once to receive his welcome guest, for Robert Moran had once been known by a different name, and had then won the lasting affection of Nick Carter, as well as of his two assistants.

As "Red Morgan," of Boston, he had been what is known as a crook; he had belonged to the worst society of crooks in the country, and he had been loyal to his kind as long as he remained with them.

But on one propitious day he made the acquaintance of Patsy Garvan, and having won Patsy's heart by his sterling qualities, he was in time made acquainted with the detective himself, where he met with the same success.

It had been through the intercession of Nick Carter and his second assistant that "Red Morgan" had been prevailed upon to give up the crooked ways of crime, with all that it comprehended, and under his true name to enter upon the practise of that profession for which he had been graduated, at Trinity College, Dublin.

As a lawyer, he had taken offices down-town in the city, and speedily had been more or less successful. His practise was steadily growing, and he was proud of it; proud of the fact that he dared to live honestly, in spite of that past of which he was now greatly ashamed.

But there are many snares for any criminal who tries to reform. There are always impediments put in their way. Acquaintances of the olden time are bound to turn up when least expected, and unpleasant recognitions are likely to be encountered upon the street at almost any moment.

All these things the would-be reformed criminal must take into consideration. He must be prepared for them, prepared to encounter them at every turn; and so it was that when Red Morgan became again Robert Moran, he did not do it blindly, but with a full and complete knowledge of what he would have to undergo.

More than six months had passed since that time when Moran undertook his own reformation, and he had begun to think that his old associates intended to leave him utterly alone—or, rather, that they would not spot

him, where he was, and that he would escape the unpleasantness of their interference.

But it was not to be.

There came a day when Mulvaney—the man who was the proprietor of Mulvaney's "Cover"—desired some legal advice, and in looking through the lawyer's directory—for he had never had occasion to employ a lawyer before—he came upon the name of Robert Moran.

It happened that Mulvaney had relations in the old country by that name, and, anyhow, the name was Irish. He preferred an Irishman to any other, and then again it might prove that this Robert Moran came from the same county in Ireland where he had relatives.

So he applied to Robert Moran.

He was obliged to wait a little time until the lawyer finished with another client who had called upon him; and then Mulvaney was admitted to the private office of the attorney.

Mulvaney was an enormously large man, and his good nature was almost as big as his body; but there was a depth of calculation in his mind that was past understanding. In business, he operated a saloon—or, rather, two saloons. He owned a large building on the East Side of the city that was known far and wide among the criminal classes as Mulvaney's Cover.*

At the time of that call upon Moran, when he projected his huge bulk through the door into the private office, he stopped short, for Mulvaney never forgot a face or a name, and he had the reputation among his class for being able to penetrate disguises which would have puzzled a fly cop.

He stopped and stared. Then he grinned, and then he laughed aloud.

"Well, well, well!" he said, in his usually genial tones. "Now, who would have thought it? Who, I ask ye, could have guessed it? Not I, for sure! How are ye, Red? Sure, it's me that's overjoyed to see you, so I am. Will you shake hands wid your old friend Mulvaney?"

"Certainly," Moran had replied; for he was instantly resolved to make the best of the encounter.

After all, he had argued to himself, "Mulvaney was always a good fellow, and he has always disclaimed that he was never a crook himself. He only stated that he could make more money by consorting with them, by caring for them, by giving them a place to hide when they had to get under cover, and all that. I think I will accept Mulvaney as I find him."

And then they had conversed together, as follows:

"Sure, Red, it does me two eyes good to see you, that it does. But where is Misther Moran, will you be telling me?"

"I am Mr. Moran," replied Robert.

"Ye don't tell me! I always said that you were handy wid names; that I did. And Moran is enough like Morgan so that it didn't require much change, I'm afther thinking. Ye just dropped the G out of it, eh?"

"I put the G into it, the other time," replied Moran. "My right name is Moran."

"Ye don't tell me! Well, now, that's fine. And the first wan of the names—Robert, is it? Is that your own, too?"

"It is."

"And again ye didn't have to change the letter of it, did ye? Faith, it was Red before, and now it's Robert. Robert Moran! Sure, that's Irish, all right; as Irish as Paddy's pig."

"That's right."

"And is it practising law ye are now?"

"I am."

"And doing fine, are ye?"

"As well as could be expected."

"Sure, I congratulate you, I do. And where, Red, did ye learn it all, at all?"

"At Trinity College, Dublin."

"Ye didn't! Will ye hear that! Faith, I'm right glad that you've struck your pace at last. There is more in this, a good deal, with less risk, too, I'm thinkin', than you'd find in the ould way of living. And have ye given up the ould life, Red?"

"I have."

"For good and all?"

"Yes."

"Sure, ye ain't gone back on your old friends, have ye?"

"I would never do that, and you know it, Mul."

"Sure I know it! None could know it better than I. But ye've kind uh shook them, for all that, ain't ye?"

"That had to be done."

"I suppose so. May I be afther askin' where your brother, Black Morgan, might be?"

"He has gone to Australia, Mulvaney."

"Australia, is it? Sure, that's a likely place to go, I'm thinking. I've have sometimes had the idea to go there me ownself—but I never did. America was good enough for the likes uh me. Is he well? Is Black Morgan well?"

"He is—or was when I last heard from him."

*Nos. 569, 570, and 571 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY contain a complete history of Mulvaney, and of many of the other characters mentioned in this story.—ED.

"When was that?"

"A matter of two months ago."

"So long as that? And would ye kindly give me his address?"

"I would if I had it, Mul. But when he wrote last he said in the letter that he was about to start for the interior, and did not know where he would stop. He said he could not give me an address to which I could send letters, and asked me to wait until I heard from him again before writing."

"So ye haven't got it, eh?"

"I haven't got it now; I will have it later."

"And will ye give it to me when you get it, Red?"

"Certainly."

"Thank ye kindly. I'd like to send him a letter, and there are a good many of the boys that would like to hear from him, too. Ye mind that?"

"I suppose so."

"Then I'll be afther dropping in again, in about a month, eh, for the address of Black?"

"Yes."

"You were a fine cracksman in the old days, Red. Sure it seems a pity to have ye give it up altogether. I suppose ye wouldn't mind now, if a rale good chance came along—eh?—of doing a good job; eh?"

"I have given it all up, Mul. I have reformed, if you know what that means?"

"I know what the word means, but, sure, I haven't any idea what the thing itself means."

"In my case it means all that the word implies. It means that I have forsaken the old ways entirely, and have taken on new ones. It means that I am living an honest life, and that I intend to keep on doing so to the end of the chapter."

"That's rot, me son, and you know it! Do ye mane to tell me that if Chris Conroy, or Peters, or any one of the old gang should show up now, and should tell ye of a good chance to rake in a fine swag, that you'd let it get past you? Not much!"

"I would."

"Well, well! Ye can't blame me for being surprised. I'll tell the boys, and——"

"I wish you wouldn't do that, Mul."

"Why not?"

"I would rather none of them knew about me now."

"Tut, tut! Why not? Sure, wouldn't ye be just the wan to defend them when they got into trouble? And couldn't they tell ye all the circumstances, and couldn't ye do the act of the lawyer for them to the quane's taste? I'm thinking ye could!"

"All the same——"

"Now—now——! Ain't their money as good as another's?"

"It is, I suppose."

"You suppose! Do ye mane that because it does not come to them through the buying and selling of stocks, or in some such way as that, you would have none of it? Don't tell me that, Red. I couldn't stand it. Of course, I will tell them about you. I will ask them to send you all their business, and they'll do it, too."

"I would rather you wouldn't. If you wish to do me a favor, now that you have found me, do it by keeping silent as to the fact of your having seen me."

"And forget that you're alive? Not much."

"I would prefer it that way."

"Well, there are times when we don't know what is best for us, and this is one of them, so far as you are concerned."

"I wish to keep away from my old associates, Mul."

"Listen to that, now! Wouldn't it jar you! Maybe, Red, if you'll tell me all about it, I may consent to do as you have asked."

CHAPTER II.

THE CRIMINAL'S SUSPICIONS.

"What is it that you wish me to tell you?" asked Moran, after a moment's thought. "It appears to me I have told you all that is to be said when I say that I have reformed, and that I would rather keep the knowledge of my whereabouts from my old associates."

"That isn't enough for me—quite," insisted Mulvaney. "And it won't be for the others, either, if anybody should ask you. What was it made you reform, Red?"

"My conscience, I expect."

"Wasn't there a woman in it, somewhere?"

"No."

"A man, then?"

"Possibly."

"Who was it?"

"I can't tell you that. It wouldn't do you any good to know about it, and I should rather say nothing."

"Do you happen to remember Ruddy Mike and Slick?" asked Mulvaney, after a moment's pause.

Moran started, for well did he remember them. Ruddy Mike had been no other than Nick Carter in disguise, while Slick had been Patsy, his two best friends.

"Do you remember them?" insisted the proprietor of the Cover.

"Yes; I remember them very well."

"Well, we have often talked about all of you, down at the old place. Do you remember the night that Ruddy made his escape from the Cover so queerly?"

"Yes."

"The boys have often talked about that night. It was the night when they tried Slick, if you recall it, for treason to the order, or something like that. I wasn't upstairs in the room where they tried him, and so I don't know much about it; but that was the last time we saw any of you, save yourself—and you left us the next day."

"That is true enough."

"Without saying good-by, either."

"Yes. It was necessary."

"Why was it necessary?"

"I decided the next day to reform. I couldn't go back among you and tell you all that, for you wouldn't have let me go."

"You're right about that, I'm thinking. You're right we wouldn't. Say, you were a member of the Order of the Python, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"Ain't there something in the rules of that order about a man who leaves it, once he has joined?"

"There is."

"Do you remember what the rule is?"

"I do."

"Will you tell it to me? I think I have heard it, but I'm not sure if I am correct or not, and so I'd like to hear ye say something about it."

"You know the rule as well as I do."

"Well, let me hear if you know it."

"You may repeat it yourself, if you like."

"Doesn't it go something like this? When a man is a member of the secret order of the Python, he is deemed to be always a member of it; he cannot resign, or leave it for any cause at all, save death; and if he should voluntarily try to sever his connection with the order, his life is declared forfeited? Eh, isn't it something like that?"

"You have repeated it almost word for word."

"And you have left the order—voluntarily—haven't you?"

"I have never formally left it."

"Well, maybe not. I hadn't thought of that. Do you mean to tell me that if you should receive an order to attend a meeting of the society now, you would obey it?"

"I might."

"The boys would be mighty glad to see you there, all right."

"I suppose so."

"And if you should refuse to come in response to such an order, then your life would be forfeited for sure; eh?"

"I suppose it would—according to their rules. But, Mulvaney——"

"Well?"

"I look to you to help me out of this difficulty."

"You do? Why?"

"Because I think you are a friend of mine. Won't you help me?"

"Why should I?"

"Because we are both Irish; because you like me, or at least you used to like me."

"I'm not saying that I don't now."

"That is what I am banking upon. I think you do. And I think that because you do like me, you will not refuse to help me now."

"How am I to do it?"

"By keeping this secret of mine, that you have discovered, a secret still. By not telling any of my old associates where I am or what I am doing."

"Well, I'll be thinking about it, Red."

"If the Order of the Python should discover where I am, I would be summoned to a meeting at once; and if I refused or neglected to attend to it——"

"It would go hard with you, wouldn't it?"

"I am afraid that it would. I don't want to undo all that I have done so far, Mul. I do want to lead a square and honest life. Won't you help me to do that?"

"I'll be thinking about it, as I told you. Now answer me some questions."

"Well?"

"Have you seen Ruddy Mike since that night at the Cover?"

"I haven't seen his scarred face but once since that time; and that was at four o'clock the following afternoon."

"Is that straight?"

"Perfectly straight."

"Where did you see him then?"

"At Flynn's, in Nassau Street."

"By appointment?"

"Yes."

"Where and when was that appointment made?"

"It was made in your place before he left it."

"Did he tell you how he got away?"

"Yes."

"That I helped him by telling him of the secret passage out of the big room?"

"Yes."

"Don't you think it would have been at least decent of him to have come back and thanked me for what I did that night?"

"He does thank you whether he ever went back to do so or not. I have heard him say as much often."

"Oh, then you *have* seen him since then?"

"I have talked frequently with him over the telephone."

"Has he started a lawyer's office, too?"

"No. But Ruddy Mike is very much under cover just now. He hasn't shown his face on the street since then."

"Is that straight, too?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where he is now?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me that?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I have promised him that I would not."

"That's all right. Is Slick with him?"

"Yes; at least, I suppose so."

"Some of the boys would like to get their paws on them two."

"I know that. He knows it, too."

"Is that why he has never been back to the Cover?"

"I suppose it is."

"Look here, Red, I'll ask you a flat question."

"Well?"

"Do you think that Ruddy Mike is on the level?"

"I know he is."

"Has he reformed like yourself."

"I don't really think he has changed a particle since you saw him, unless it is in his looks. He may have done that. I think he knows how to do it if he has to. But at heart I believe him to be precisely the same man he was then."

"You say that as if you meant it."

"I do mean it."

"What have you got to say for Slick? He was more your friend than his pal was. What have you got to say about him?"

"I think I can assure you that the same is true of him that I have said about the other."

"Well, you're a queer lot, you three. I don't half-like it. And the boys don't like it a little bit. They are dead sore. Say, have you any idea what they are saying, down at the Cover, about them two guns?"

"You may tell me."

"They are saying, flat out, that Ruddy Mike was Nick Carter in disguise, and that Slick was one of his assistants. They don't pretend to guess which one, but they are sure that he was one of them, and they won't have it any other way."

Moran shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you know whether it is true or not?" persisted Mulvaney.

"How should I know any more about it than you do yourself? I have lived very quietly ever since I left your place. I'm not a wizard or a mind-reader any more than you are. If the men down there choose to say that Ruddy and Slick were a pair of detectives, all that I can say in reply is, that they are probably welcome to their opinions, but that I didn't think so. I would have been the first to betray them, at that time, if I had thought so, and that is all there is about it."

"I wonder if you're telling me the truth, Red?"

"I never tell anything but the truth, now, Mul."

"Rats. Don't get sanctimonious, whatever you do. It won't wash with me. I'll think over all that we have talked about, and I'll come to see you again. And now what do you suppose brought me here to-day?"

"I haven't an idea, unless you discovered, somehow, that I was here."

"I didn't. I had no idea of finding you here when I walked into the place than you had that I was coming."

"What brought you here, then?"

"I had some law business that I wanted attended to. I saw the name Moran in the directory, and, having some relations of that name in Ireland, I picked you. Now, I'll tell you the business, and you can attend to it for me."

CHAPTER III.

THE EFFECT OF A DEATH-SENTENCE.

All this, as the reader will have guessed, was the reason for the announcement that Joseph made when he threw open the library door and mentioned the name of Mr. Moran.

"Jove, Robert!" exclaimed the detective, as he came forward with extended hand, "I'm glad to see you. There is something in telepathy, after all, for it isn't half an hour ago since I told Chick that it was most time you were coming in to see us. How are you?"

"Fine. Never better."

"But there is something on your mind. I can see that with half an eye."

"It is true, then?"

"What is it?"

"They have found me out."

"Who? The old gang?"

"Yes."

"What makes you think that?"

"Mulvaney has been at my office to see me."

"Eh? Is that so? Old Mul himself, eh? When?"

"This afternoon. I knocked off business early in order to come up here and see you about it."

"How did he learn where you were?"

"He blundered onto me."

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about it."

"He wanted a lawyer. He looked in the lawyer's directory. He saw the name Moran, and he has relations in Ireland by that name. The long and short of it is that he walked into my office without any more idea of seeing me than I had of seeing him; but he knew me the instant his eyes rested upon me."

"Sure. Why shouldn't he? Tell me about the scene that followed. It must have been interesting."

"Not so interesting as you might think. He was surprised. I could see that at once."

"Well?"

"He wanted to know what had happened, and I told him."

"Told him about what? Be more explicit, please."

"About my having reformed; about my name, and all that. He was for telling the boys at once where to find me, so that I would get their business, and when I begged him not to do so, he said he would think it over."

"He'll think it over, all right—for just as long a time as it takes him to get back to the Cover, and then he will tell every one of them about it. You may be sure of that."

"That is what I feared. That is why I wished to come here and tell you about it at once."

"Well, what more, Robert?"

"He told me that the guns down there at his place were dead certain now that Ruddy and Nick Carter were one and the same. They are also certain that Slick is one of your assistants, and, although I did all that I could to disabuse him of that idea, he went away with it about as firmly established in his mind as ever."

"I haven't a doubt of that."

"He seemed to take great pleasure in reminding me of one of the rules of the Order of the Python."

"What rule is that?"

"It means death for a member to attempt to leave the order after he has once joined it."

"He reminded you of that, did he?"

"Yes."

"In a threatening manner?"

"No; but one can never tell of what Mulvaney is thinking by his manner of speech."

"I know that."

"Would you like my own opinion about the circumstance?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"I think that he is disposed to like me. I believe that he thinks that by keeping my secret, and so holding the threat of death over me—from the order, you understand—that he will have me thoroughly in his power, and in that way can force me to do just about what he pleases."

"I wouldn't be surprised if that is true."

"If it *is* true, he will not betray me to the others—at once."

"Possibly not; although I think he will do that eventually. Did he question you?"

"Yes."

"Closely?"

"Yes."

"How did you get around the questions he asked? You didn't lie to him outright, did you?"

"No; although I was tempted to do so. Lies don't

pay—ever. I evaded his questions as best I could. When he asked me about Ruddy Mike, I told him that I hadn't seen Ruddy Mike's scarred face since the day following the one when you left his place. And that is literally true."

"So it was; but I am afraid that Mul was not deceived."

"So am I."

"And, Robert, you have got to look out for squalls."

"I suppose so."

"If the Order of the Python finds out where you are—if they discover it as an order—they will find a way to do you to death, unless you are closely on your guard."

"Of course I am not afraid of them; of course I am not scared, but——"

"But you don't want to get the blade of a knife shoved between your ribs, or into your back some dark night; you don't wish to be shot from a hallway at night."

"Not exactly."

"Then, Robert, I am of the opinion that the best thing you could do would be to take a vacation. Go somewhere and rest up a bit, and——"

"I won't do that."

"Why not?"

"Well, there are a lot of reasons."

"Tell me a few of them."

"My business is growing now, and I don't want to give it up, as I should have to do if I went away. I would lose all that I have gained."

"I guess that is so."

"And, Nick, I am not made of the kind of stuff that runs away from danger. I couldn't do it if I tried. This thing has got to be fought out some time to a finish, and it might as well be now as later."

"I agree with you as to that."

"I shall remain where I am, no matter what happens. If fate has decreed that I am to be done to death by the men I used to associate with, let it happen, although I shall do all I can to prevent it. But I won't run."

"That's the talk. And the boys here, and I, will stand by you to the end."

"I don't think that you and the boys will be out of it, Nick, when once Mulvaney has told the guns down at his place about seeing me. I have told him enough, so that he will connect my changed mode of life with you, in some way, if he does not do so already."

"Well?"

"I think they will swear out a death-warrant against all of us. I think they will meet—I am referring to the Order of the Python now—and will condemn you and me, and also Patsy, and perhaps Chick, to death. And when once that is done, there will be no time lost in carrying out the sentence."

"If it can be carried out."

"That is what I mean, of course."

"Tell me, Robert, how those condemnation proceedings are carried out, in the order, will you, I want to know something about it."

"Why, in this case, your name and mine, for instance, would be brought up before a regular meeting. Charges would be read, and there would be no defense."

"Well?"

"The meeting would then vote, solemnly, as to whether we were to be condemned or not. If there were a majority of black balls in the ballot-box at the close of the voting, we would be condemned, and then a committee would be chosen to determine the manner of death."

"The manner of death? What difference would that make, as long as we were put to death?"

"The order insists on having the say about that, so that there may be as little risk as possible. The manner of death, even the place where the killing shall take place, is selected, and after that a committee of three is drawn by lot, to carry out the sentence."

"I understand."

"When the committee of death, as it is called, has been selected, the three who are chosen are relieved of all responsibility as to meetings after that until their work has been done, and they are not expected to report back again until we are dead. See?"

"Yes."

"They are given a certain length of time in which to perform their work. If it is not accomplished by that time they are discharged, and, unless they can give a good excuse, are likely to meet the same fate. In any event, they are fined heavily, and their names go on a black-list. They are in bad repute until they make up for it in some way."

"I see. Now, what is the usual form of condemnation? I mean how do they usually kill their victims?"

"They adopt various methods. It depends almost entirely upon the occupation and habits of the intended victim."

"With me, for instance——?"

"I couldn't even venture a guess."

"With yourself, then?"

"I would probably be shot or stabbed in my office, and it would be made to appear that a client had done it; or something would be arranged so that suspicion would never fall upon the persons who really did the deed."

"It is really a society of assassination, isn't it?"

"In some respects it is."

"Do you know what I think we had better do, Patsy?" asked Nick, suddenly turning to his second assistant.

"Go back again to Mulvaney's?" asked Patsy, in reply.

"I was thinking about it. That is what I had in mind when I asked the question."

"It is not to be thought of," said Moran quickly.

"Why not, Robert?"

"Your life wouldn't be worth the toss of a coin. You would be shot down or done to death, somehow, the instant you were seen there."

"Granted; but suppose I returned there this time without being seen?"

"I hadn't thought of that. Could you do it?"

"I don't know. But the place is full of secret holes and passages, as we have reason to believe. Patsy and I know some of them fairly well, and we could probably find others. It is an idea that I will have to think over."

"I believe it could be done," said Patsy.

"Anyhow, we'll think it over. But that is the way to find out what they intend to do; and if it is done at all, it should be attempted this very night."

CHAPTER IV.

A MAN ON THE TRAIL.

Robert Moran had no idea that he was followed when he left his office after the interview with Mulvaney to go to the home of Nick Carter.

But Mulvaney was a man who never did things by halves.

He had questioned Moran very closely, and, whether satisfied or not with the replies he had received, he argued that it was just as well to be sure.

To that end, when he left the office of the young lawyer, he crossed the street at once to a public telephone, and there he called up his own private number—for anybody may have a telephone these days.

Having obtained the number, the following conversation took place over the wire.

"Hello!" said Mulvaney. "Who is there?"

"Scotty," came the answer.

"Good, Scotty. I was on the point of sending for you to come to the phone. It is dead luck that you happened to be there on hand. Are you dressed so that you can go out on the street?"

"No; but I can do it in a very few minutes."

"Then do so, and come to me here."

"Where are you?"

Mulvaney gave the street and number, and then added:

"Don't ask questions now. I will tell you all about what I want of you when you get here, only take my word for it that it is necessary that you should lose no time in starting. I have got great news for you, and something important for you to do."

"All right. I'll be there in a few minutes."

Nevertheless, it was half an hour before Scotty arrived at the appointed place, and during all that time Mulvaney remained on guard where he could have seen Moran had the young lawyer left his office.

But he did not do so.

In fact, he was seated in his chair before his desk all the time, thinking over that last interview with Mulvaney, and wondering what would come of it. He was thinking whether he should go at once to the detective and tell him about it, or if it would be better to let things take their own course.

We know how he finally decided.

When Scotty appeared he found Mulvaney awaiting him, and the latter at once told him what had happened.

"I have something on me mind, Scotty," he said, "and sure I don't know whether I ought to tell the boys about it or not. But I've got to take somebody into me confidence, and so I have selected you."

"That's all right. What is it all about?"

"I have just seen Red."

"Red! Red Morgan?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In that building over there."

"Did he see you?"

"Yes. We talked together."

"What is he doing in that building?"

"He has an office over there. He is a full-fledged lawyer now, and is practising the profession."

"You don't tell me! I always thought he was a law-

yer, since that time when he defended Slick, when we tried him for treason against the order."

"Well, he's a lawyer now, all right."

"Living the simple life?"

"Exactly."

"Under his own name of Morgan?"

"He tells me that Morgan was not his right name, but that he only had to drop out the G in order to make it his own."

"Moran, eh?"

"Yes."

"What did he have to say for himself?"

"He tried to make me promise that I would not betray him to the guns down at my place. He says he has reformed and is living honest."

"Rats!"

"That's what I said to him."

"What is he up to, anyhow?"

"I don't know; but you can bank your pile on it that he is one of two things just at present."

"Well, what?"

"He is either a fly cop, and has been one all along, or else he is playing the game of stool-pigeon."

Scotty shook his head.

"I don't think it is either one of them," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't."

"What do you think about him?"

"In my opinion, Red has gone wrong."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I think he was a crook, all right. We know that, or ought to. We both knew his brother, and a squarer man than Black Morgan never jimmied a window or blew open a safe."

"You're right about that."

"Black said that his brother was a crook; he vouched for him that night when he first appeared at your place. What Black said went with us, didn't it?"

"It sure did."

"Well, then, Red was a crook, all right, when his brother said so."

"Then he's doing the stool-pigeon now, just as I said."

"I don't believe it. I don't believe it is in the Morgan—or perhaps I should say Moran—blood to do that."

"Then what do you think?"

"I think that he has run afoul of that detective we all hate so much—Nick Carter, I mean. I think that Nick Carter has reformed him, and that Red told you the truth when he said he was living honest now."

"Then you think we ought to keep the fact that we have found him a secret, and not let the boys know anything about it?"

"No; I don't."

"What, then?"

"I don't know. I want to see him first. If possible, I would like to have a talk with him myself."

"I think that would be a good idea."

"Is he in there yet?"

"Yes."

"Then you mosey along home and leave me on guard."

"That was what I was about to suggest."

"In this get-up I have got on the police won't know me."

"Neither will Red himself."

"I'm not so sure about that. And I don't much care whether he does or not."

"Why don't you go right up to his office and have a talk with him?"

"I know a better way than that."

"What is it?"

"I'll wait here till he comes out, and then I'll take his trail. I'll see where he goes. If he should go straight from his office to Nick Carter's house, we'll know what to think about things, for it is a cinch, if he does that, that he goes there to tell the detective about your call."

"Sure thing."

"I'll follow him. If he goes to see Nick Carter, I'll have my talk with him after he comes out."

"Scotty! You don't mean that you'll knife him, or anything like that, do you?"

"No; I don't mean that—yet——"

"I'd hate to think that I had betrayed him to his death, without giving him a chance to say a word in his own defense."

"I'll give him all the chance in the world. But don't forget, Mul, that his life is forfeited already, according to the rules of the order."

"I know that. I told him so, and he remembers it."

"What did he say about it?"

"He said he knew the rule. He said he wanted to lead an honest life, and he tried to make me promise that I wouldn't betray him to the others."

"Well, we'll see—what we will see. Skip along home now, Mul, and wait for me there."

"All right."

"And in the meantime, or, at least, until you have seen me again, don't say anything to the others about having met Red."

"I won't."

"Maybe I can make him listen to reason. Perhaps I can bring him back to your place to-night, to stand trial like a man. It would go for a good deal with the boys if he should go there voluntarily, especially if he can tell us anything about his brother."

"He told me that Black is in Australia."

"Then he was sent there by force. Black would never have lighted out of his own accord, without leaving word of some sort for us."

"I don't think so, either."

"Anyhow, I'll find out all about the lay he is on before you see me again at the Cover. You can bank on that."

"And you'll promise me that you won't do any killing; eh?"

"I'll promise—for the present."

"If you could only get him down to the Cover, where we could all have a nice friendly talk with him, it would be fine, and then I think that everything would turn out all right."

"That's what I'll try to do. Did you ask him anything about Ruddy, and Slick?"

"Sure."

"What did he have to say about them?"

"He assured me that they were both on the level, but I have been thinking since then that his ideas of the proper definition of that word, and my own, might differ; particularly as he is now leading an honest life."

"You bet your sweet life they differ. I'm glad you sent for me, Mul. I think I will know how to handle this matter better than any one else could do it."

"I think so, too."

And that is how it happened that when Robert Moran came down from his office and passed out upon the street, Scotty, the bank-burglar, was close behind him every step he took. Scotty followed him to the home of Nick Carter, and saw him enter there, and Scotty waited outside until he should come forth again.

There was small chance now that Moran, or Red as he was called, would be permitted to escape the surveillance of his old associates.

CHAPTER V.

A BURGLAR'S MIDNIGHT CALL.

Robert Moran was keeping bachelor quarters in a flat in Fifty-second Street, and Scotty followed him there when he came out of Nick Carter's house.

He saw him enter the place with a key, and he knew that he had followed the young lawyer to his "hang-out."

It was then rather late in the evening, and Scotty had no fear that his prey would go forth again that night, for during the time of keeping the trail from the detective's house there had been an interval when Moran had stopped and taken his dinner at a restaurant.

Scotty turned away as soon as he was satisfied that Moran had reached his home, and he walked deliberately to the corner, where he entered a drug-store and made use of the telephone.

Having connected with Mulvaney, he reported as follows:

"You needn't look for me till late, I have got a call to make at Mr. Moran's house to-night, and I don't know what time I will select to do it. It won't be till late, anyhow."

With that he hung up the phone, and then went deliberately to a restaurant himself, where he satisfied the cravings of his own stomach.

Not once did he return to the neighborhood of Moran's house until the hour was long after midnight, for he had no fear that Moran would go out again, and, truth to tell, he did not much care whether he did or not.

He had determined to enter the house after his accustomed manner—that is, he intended to burglarize it, and he would be quite as well pleased if the owner were not there, as to find him ready to receive the unexpected call.

If Moran should not be there, Scotty would content himself with searching the premises carefully, from end to end, reading letters and scraps of paper, and endeavoring in that way to determine the manner of life the young man was leading; and, after that, he would await his return, for the conversation he wished to hold with him.

But if he should be there—well, the conversation would take place at once. That would be all the difference.

When Scotty approached the house, he did not know in which flat Moran lived, but he was not long in de-

termining that, for he soon found the name on the letter-boxes inside the vestibule.

It was a very simple thing, indeed, for him to open the door and admit himself to the hall, and then to mount the stairs to the requisite place, exactly as if he had belonged there, although he did take care to make as little noise as possible.

Before the door of the flat he wanted to enter, he stopped and listened.

Finally he got down upon his knees and pressed his ear to the crack under the door, and in that position he continued to listen for a long time.

But no sound whatever came to him—not even the sound of snoring.

The very quiet reassured Scotty, and presently he began to work carefully in making his entrance to the place.

He found it to be simpler than he had supposed, for he had reasoned that Moran, knowing about the methods of housebreakers, would have provided against such visits.

It was evident, however, that he had not done so, for Scotty had only to use his skeleton-keys, and presently to cut through a chain bolt, and he was inside the flat.

The door admitted him to the front room, or parlor, of the apartment. Back of that was an alcove, and upon the bed it contained he could dimly see the form of a person lying apparently asleep.

He tiptoed across the room toward the front windows, thus for a moment turning his back to the bed with its supposedly sleeping occupant; and he was halfway across the room when he was almost paralyzed by hearing a calm voice behind him say quietly:

"Good evening, my friend. You entered without ringing, didn't you? Be careful! Don't move or turn about until I tell you to do so, or you are likely to get hurt. I have you covered, all right. Will you keep still until I give you permission to move?"

"Yes," replied Scotty sulkily.

He was more startled than he would have admitted, for the voice he heard was not the voice of Red at all; rather, it was the voice of another that he had not at all expected to hear, and the recollection of which made the cold chills creep down his spine in a way that was decidedly uncomfortable.

If he had been asked to identify the voice at that moment, he would have sworn that it belonged to Ruddy Mike—although Ruddy Mike was scarcely known to him at all.

He had heard that voice only on one occasion, and well he remembered that. It was when Nick, in that character, had been cornered near the end of the bar, down at Mulvaney's, and had mysteriously made his escape from the place after turning off the lights.

Ruddy Mike!

He recalled in that instant all the fears that had been expressed by his associates regarding that man. He did not *know* him to be Nick Carter; he could not have said that he even suspected that Ruddy and Nick were one and the same; but he *feared* that it might be the case.

And now, if he were not mistaken, if this man on the bed who spoke to him so calmly *were* Ruddy Mike; if Ruddy Mike and Nick Carter *were* one and the same, why, then—he was up against it hard. He knew that.

"The devil was awake all the time," he thought savagely to himself. "He heard me monkeying around that door, and all the time he was laughing in his sleeve, waiting for me to enter the room."

"Put your two hands over your head, me friend," said the calm voice from behind him, "but don't try to make any other move than that, if you know what's good for you. There is a gas-chandelier up there that you can rest them on, if you're so minded. It'll be easier. That's right. Now, who are ye?"

"I'm Scotty," was the surly reply.

"Scotty! is it? Faith, I've heard of you, me boy. Aren't you the wan who prosecuted my friend Slick, that time, down at the Cove?"

"I am."

"Sure, you're quite a lawyer, I hear."

"I used to be a lawyer."

"Oh, ye did, eh? And ye wanted to prosecute me that same night, didn't you. Ye needn't answer that question, for I have the answer already. To what am I indebted for the honor of this pleasant call, me friend?"

"I wanted to see——"

"Go on. See who? Who did ye want to see?"

"Red."

"Sure, and this is a funny place to look for Red. What made ye think ye'd find him here? Tell me that."

"I was told I would find him here."

"So? Who told ye?"

"Mulvaney."

"Well, Mulvaney lied to ye, as ye see."

"His name is on the door, all right."

"Whose name? Red's?"

"His right name, yes. It's Moran. His name is there."

"It seems to me that you're taking a heap for granted, me friend Scotty."

"Anyhow, he came in here to-night, for I saw him do it. I followed him from——"

"Followed who?"

"Red."

"Now it's you that's lying, Scotty. Ye didn't folly him at all, at all; ye follied me."

"Who are you, anyhow?"

"Don't ye know who I am? Haven't ye guessed?"

"Are you Ruddy Mike?"

"That same, by your leave."

"Well, then you came here from Nick Carter's house, for that is the place to which I followed Red, and it is the place from which I followed you."

"Sure, you're a wise wan, take it all in all, so ye are, Scotty. Ye should have stuck to the law, with all that perspicacity of yours. So ye came here to see Red, did ye? What did ye want to see him about?"

"That's my business—and his."

"And mine, too, by your leave, me friend, as you'll soon be afther finding out. Now, what did ye want to see him about?"

"I wanted to ask him some questions."

"Well, ye can ask them of me just the same as if it was him, so ye can."

"I don't propose to do that."

"Don't ye, now! You go on and ask 'em, or sure I'll be afther amputating wan of your purty fingers, betwixt the chandelier and the hand. I can do it from here with a bullet, dead easy."

"I suppose so. If you shoot, I'll fight."

"If I shoot, ye won't have to fight."

"I wish you'd let me take my hands down. It's mighty uncomfortable holding them in the air in this way. You can get out of that bed and come here and take my weapons away from me, all right, so that I won't be dangerous."

"You should have thought of all them things before ye knocked at me door, me friend. Keep your two hands where they are, or sure I'll break wan of your arms, and you wouldn't like that."

"No, I wouldn't."

"Then don't be trying any funny business with me, Scotty. Mulvaney sent ye here to find Red, did he?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"I suppose you know the story as well as I do myself."

"I'm asking you questions, and it'll be a whole lot handier if you'll answer them as I ask them. Do ye mind that?"

"Yes."

"What did you want to find Red for?"

"We wanted to know what he was up to."

"Who wanted to know that?"

"Mulvaney and me."

"'Cause why? Tell me that."

"Well, it's this way, if you must know: Red belonged to the Order——"

"What order?"

"The Order of the Python, curse you!"

"Go on, then."

"He belonged to the order, and he left it voluntarily. He up and tells Mul as much, and says he's for living on the honest lay. He pleads with Mul not to betray him to the guns down at his place, and Mul thinks it all over. Then he decides that he'd as soon not tell, and so leave Red alone, provided it's all straight to do so. Straight to the others, I mean."

"I know what ye mane."

"But Mul thinks it is best to talk it over with me, so he sends for me. Now, that's the whole layout."

"And I suppose you appointed yourself a committee of one to decide what would be best for Red, didn't you? Well, we'll see about that!"

CHAPTER VI.

A BARGAIN WITH A THIEF.

"Look here, Ruddy," said Scotty angrily, "you are running this thing into the ground. How long are you going to keep me standing here like a bottle, anyhow?"

"Till I get ready to give ye leave to alter your position. Why?"

"My arms are numb now."

"You ought to be thankful that it isn't your head that is numb, for it was my bounden duty to shoot ye dead when ye entered this place, and you know it. You came here to kill Red and——"

"I didn't. I'll take my oath I didn't."

"As if I would believe ye."

"I was under promise to Mul not to do that."

"Maybe; but ye'd have done the same thing in another way. Ye'd have enticed him, or taken him by force, whichever seemed the easier, to Mul's; and then, sure, them others would have made mincemeat of him, and you know it."

"That wouldn't have been my doing; and if he was fool enough to go, it wouldn't have been my funeral."

"No; but you'd have made it his, all right."

"Will you tell me how it happened to be you here instead of the man I supposed I was following?" asked Scotty.

"Sure. I'll be franker with you than you are with me. You followed Red from his office to Nick Carter's house, ye say?"

"Yes."

"Well, you're right about that. He did go to the home of the detective to tell him about the call he had from Mul this afternoon. He talked it over with Carter, and the detective advised him to send for me. He did that, and when I got there, sure I told him that I would wear his clothes in going away, and take his place and come to his home, as I have done; for, you see, Misther Carter guessed at once that wan of you guns would follow Mr. Moran from his office, and would chase him home—just as you have done."

"So that was how, was it?"

"That was how."

"Do you know what I'm thinking about you, Ruddy?"

"I'm sure I haven't an idea in the worrrld."

"I'm thinking that you are a very clever actor, indeed; but I'm also thinking that you are Nick Carter yourself, and that all the time you have been playing Ruddy; you have fooled the whole bunch of us nicely."

"And have you just arrived at that conclusion?" asked the detective, in his natural voice, and rising from the bed.

He threw back the coverings and stepped out upon the floor, thus disclosing the fact that he was fully clothed. The light that shone into the room from an arc-lamp in the street had sufficed for them until now; but the detective lighted one of the jets in the chandelier over Scotty's head while he awaited Scotty's answer to the last question.

He strode around in front of the discomfited burglar, and stood facing him, disclosing the fact that he was no longer disguised at all, save for the outer clothing.

"Have you only just arrived at that conclusion?" he asked again.

"I guessed it all along; but I've never been certain. But you are Nick Carter."

"Yes; I am Nick Carter. And Scotty, I have got a nice, new, freshly written warrant for you in one of my pockets. What do you think of that?"

"I suppose there is more than one of them out for me, isn't there?" replied Scotty, with a leer. "In the fiend's name, man, let me take my hands down, will you? I'll answer your questions, if that is all you want."

For reply, the detective stepped a little closer and rapidly relieved the burglar of all his weapons, then he motioned toward a chair in one corner of the room, and replied:

"Yes; you may take them down now. I think I have tortured you enough. But if you try any monkey business with me, Scotty, it will go hard with you."

"I won't try."

"See that you do not."

"Are you going to take me to prison, Carter?"

"That I am, Scotty. The police have been looking for you for a long time. I told them not long ago where you might be found, and they asked me to bring you in when the opportunity offered and you could do me no more good. I think it will be about twenty years for yours, eh, Scotty?"

"If they send me away for all they've got against me, it'll be a heap more than that."

"Did you ever hear of Australia, Scotty?" asked the detective, after a pause.

"I have. That is where Black Morgan is now, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Why did you ask me about it?"

"I was wondering if you would like to go out there."

"Instead of the prison?"

"Yes."

"Say, you don't mean it, do you?"

"I'm in dead earnest, Scotty."

"What have I got to do for the chance?"

"You've got to give up about all you know."

"I won't betray my pals, not even for that."

"That's very decent of you, Scotty, and I'm not going to ask you to do that."

"What do you mean, then?"

"I mean that I'm not going to ask you to betray any of your friends by name. I know quite enough about them already; all that is necessary."

"What do you want me to give up?"

"All that you know about the inside of Mulvaney's Cover. I know something about it already, but not quite enough for what I wish to do. You see, Scotty, it wouldn't be quite safe for me to appear there again in the character of Ruddy Mike, and if I should try to assume some other disguise they would be suspicious and spot me at once."

"You're right about that."

"So, inasmuch as it is necessary that I should go there again, I prefer to do so in my own proper person. To do that I have got to know a whole lot more than I do about the inside of that building."

"And you think I can tell you?"

"I don't think anything about it. I *know* you can."

"Suppose I refuse."

"I shall not ask you twice, Scotty. If you refuse, you go straight off to prison, and there won't be any let-up; if you tell me all I want to know, and if your information is worth anything—I'll see about that Australian proposition."

"If I give up all I know about the place, without mentioning names of pals, will you let me get away?"

"No; but I'll send you away—after I've proved that your information is correct."

"Oh!"

"Did you think, Scotty, that you could tell me anything that you'd a mind to, and that I'd send you away on the strength of it, without proving you? Not much. I'm not so easy as all that, my friend."

"Anyhow, I'll accept—provided you'll stand to what you've said."

"That's agreed, then."

"Tell me just what you will do with me, Carter, if I give up all I know about the place."

"I'll keep you where you can do no harm until this case is finished; then I will take you to one of the ships of a freight line that I know about, that sails around Cape Horn for Australia. I'll see that your passage is paid out, so you won't have to worry about that, and there will be a small nest-egg for you to begin with when you arrive. The captain of the ship will know enough about you so that you won't be permitted to escape from it, and after that it will be up to you. But if you would take my advice——"

"Well, maybe I'd take it—in a new country. What is it?"

"You'll lead an honest life when you get there. That is what Black Morgan is doing."

"Do you know that to be true?"

"Yes."

"In what part of Austral——"

"I won't tell you that. It will be better for both of you that you do not meet, at least not at once. You are a lawyer; you can establish yourself if you make up your mind to do it. He had a profession, also, and he has established himself already."

"Carter, will you take my word for it if I say that I'll do it?"

"I'll take your word that you mean it now; but the point is, will you stick to it after you get there? It is up-hill work for such as you, trying to live honestly. You have been a thief so long that it will be as hard to give up as opium."

"I'll try, anyhow."

"That's the talk. That is better than to promise the whole thing. I will do my part, just as I have already promised you."

"I know that you are a man of your word, no matter to whom it is given."

"Well, you respect me for it, don't you?"

"I surely do."

"Then be one yourself."

"I'll try that, too."

"Begin now, then. Do you promise me that you will give up all you know about the secrets of the building known as Mulvaney's Cover?"

"I do."

"Can you use a pencil so that you can make plans for me?"

"Yes. I studied architecture before I studied law."

"Good. Now, do you think you know all the secret places in that big building?"

"No. I don't think I know them all. Nobody does that, not even Mul himself. That old fellow they called Cranky knew more of them than anybody, but he's out of the way now. But I can tell you this: I know more about the secret passages, stairs, and escapes from that house than anybody else does, unless it is Peters."

"Then that will do very well. By the way, is Peters

around there now? I don't want him for anything in particular, and you need not think I am asking you to give him the double-cross, for I'm not. Is he around there now?"

"Yes. He was there last night."

"And Conroy? And Murphy, and the others I knew down there?"

"I think they are all there."

"Is there any one of them for whom you feel an especial friendship?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because I want to know."

"No; there isn't one of them for whom I care a rap, unless it is old Mul himself. I have always had a liking for him, and take it all in all, he is as square as he could be, in his business. If you mean that you would like to do me a favor when it comes to a show-down, if you'll not let anything happen to old Mul, you'll do it."

"I like Mul myself, in some ways. I'll see about it. Now, yonder is paper and pencil. Get to work with your plans, and give me the best results you can."

CHAPTER VII.

THE EXECUTIONERS' MEETING.

The sun was shining in at the windows of the flat in which Moran made his home when Scotty finished his plans and handed them over to the detective.

He had talked while he worked with the pencil, and with the result that the completion of the drawings also marked the end of his story of the secret passages of Mulvaney's Cover.

But both were complete, each in its way, and Nick Carter knew that he had at hand as complete a plan as could be made of the house.

He knew, moreover, that with that in mind—for he intended to study it thoroughly, and to leave it behind him when he went to the place—he might venture with comparative safety into the dread place again; the house where he had once come so near to death—from which many had never escaped with their lives.

"Now," said Scotty, when the detective folded the plans and put them in one of his pockets, "what is the next move?"

"The next one is that you are to come with me," replied the detective.

"Where to, Carter?"

"To my house."

"Are you going to keep me there until you send me out to Australia?"

"Yes."

"Under guard?"

"No; but in a room from which you cannot hope to escape, even if you should try. You need not be alarmed. It is as comfortable as any sleeping-room—much more comfortable than the one you have been occupying down at the Cover, I'll be bound—and you will be provided with everything you require."

"Have you thought what will be the condition of mind of the guns down there when I don't turn up from this expedition?" asked Scotty, after a pause.

"That is one of the things I am going there to find out."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

"According to your own story, Mul was to tell nothing of having seen Moran until after he saw you again."

"That is right."

"Well, he will wait for you, at least, until he gets out of bed to-day. He doesn't do that until after noon, as I happen to know, so the secret will be safe until then, at least."

"Yes."

"But when you do not appear he will be worried. By night, when you have not shown up, he will conclude that something has happened to you. He will think that you have fallen into one of the mysteries that have puzzled all of you late."

"And he'll call upon the others for a consultation."

"I don't think he'll do that at once, Scotty."

"Why not?"

"He'll keep thinking that you will come in within the next hour, and he'll wait. He will doubtless continue to wait until late to-night before finding the courage to tell what he knows. And by that time I want to be there."

"I see. Is that all you wanted the plans for?"

"No; I want them in order to find out exactly what those guns intend to do about Moran—or Red, as you know him."

"I'll tell you one thing about that."

"Well, what is it?"

"They will swear his life away in about fifteen minutes after they know about him."

"I have supposed as much as that.

"And a committee will be appointed to kill him after the manner of his death has been determined upon."

"That is something that I wished to ask you about."

"What do you want to know about it?"

"Is the particular manner of death always decided upon before a committee is appointed to carry out an execution?"

"Yes."

"Have the members of the committee no discretion in the matter?"

"None whatever."

"Then if they should decide, for instance, that Moran must be stabbed to death, there is no danger that he would be poisoned, or shot, instead?"

"None."

"Or pushed off the bridge, or strangled, or anything else but the orders?"

"None."

"You are positive of that?"

"Absolutely so."

"What would happen to the member of such a committee who assumed the responsibility of murdering a victim in another manner than the one ordered?"

"He would be condemned to death himself."

"I am glad to know all this, for it helps me out considerably. But I would like to ask you why the rule is so rigid in that respect?"

"It has to be rigid. If there were any latitude at all, there would never be any way of telling if the sentence had been properly executed. They might order you to be shot, for example, and I might be the member of the committee who had to do the act, for the committee decides among themselves who shall have the first try."

"Well?"

"I might get a chance to tie a sixty-pound shot to your feet and heave you overboard, and I would naturally suppose that no death could be more certain than that."

"Well?"

"All the same, you might come to just as I heaved you overboard, and you might cut the cord that bound the shot fast to you. You might be saved."

"I see the point."

"Later, under such circumstances, you would show up, and would not be dead at all. The order won't stand for that sort of thing. It happened twice, and then the present rule was adopted."

"It is absolutely arbitrary, then?"

"Yes."

"Now, is the death-committee a permanent one, or is it appointed at each sitting?"

"It is appointed for each case as one arises. Or, rather, it is not appointed at all, but is drawn by lot. A lot of black balls and white ones are drawn from a box. You know how the thing is done."

"I can imagine."

"Well, that's it."

"How many are on the death-committee?"

"There used to be three. Now there are five."

"Why the change?"

"It leaves the name of the man who really does the killing that much more in doubt."

"You say they decide among themselves who shall have the first try?"

"Yes."

"Just what did you mean by that?"

"In this case of Red's, five men will draw black balls from the box. They will then organize the death-committee."

"In secret?"

"Certainly. After the meeting adjourns they are left in the meeting-room alone together. Any one who remains to listen will be put to death."

"Well, go on."

"As soon as they are assured that they are alone, they organize by electing a chairman. They already have had the manner of the death decided for them."

"I understand."

"The chairman calls the committee meeting to order, and says to them, something like this: 'You all know what we are here for. Red has been sentenced to death, and we have got to carry out the execution. Now, it is for us to decide who will do it. Is there one of you who will volunteer?'"

"That is not likely to be the case, is it?"

"No; it never is, only in the case of a great personal grudge. I know of one instance——"

"Never mind that. Keep to the subject."

"Well, if nobody volunteers, three black balls and two white ones are placed in the box, and they all draw. Those who draw the two white ones leave the room, but remain outside the door, waiting. They must not descend to the lower part of the building, where the others

can see them, until all the other members of the committee are with them."

"That is so the others will not know which one of the five finally carries out the order, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"Remember, there are three still left in the room."

"Yes."

"Now the box is used again. This time there is only one white ball placed in the box, and there are two black ones. The man who draws the white one goes out of the room and joins the other two who are waiting, thus leaving the last two black balls inside the room alone."

"I see."

"Now, the three men outside never know who is the final one drawn. They know that it is one of the two, but they do not know which one."

"I understand. But how is it finally decided between those two who remain?"

"In the old-fashioned manner of flipping a penny; heads or tails. A coin is first tossed in the air to see who shall toss for the call. See?"

"Yes."

"For instance, suppose you and I remained."

"Yes."

"I would say, 'Carter, shall I toss for the flip?' You would say, 'Yes.' Then I would do the first toss, you would call 'heads,' we will say, and win. You could then decide whether I should flip the coin and give you the call, or whether you would flip it yourself and give me the call."

"I see."

"That done, the rest is decided by the next toss. Now, if you are the unfortunate one—that is, if you happened to be the one who has to do the killing, I am supposed never to tell of it, under any circumstances. If I tell, I am the next member of the order executed. It is a rule that is never broken."

"So that even of the original committee of five, only two really know who the guilty one is?"

"Yes."

"Suppose the appointed one fails?"

"Then the other black ball of the last two has to do it."

"And if he fails?"

"Understand, they can only fail in two ways: By being killed themselves, or by being caught at it, and imprisoned."

"Yes."

"If both fail, then the three remaining hold another meeting in the same manner, and it is decided among them all over again."

CHAPTER VIII.

MULVANEY'S FIERCE ATTACK.

When the detective arrived at his home that morning, with Scotty in tow, so to speak, Moran had already gone to his law-office down-town, and Nick did not see him.

But Scotty was taken to the strong room at the top of the house, where he was to be kept until the case was finished, and then the detective called his two assistants to him, and told them of all that had happened in his experiences with Scotty.

"I am going to Moran's office now, to tell him about it," he said. "I think I will want both of you to go with me to Mulvaney's to-night. Would you like to go, Chick?"

"I certainly would."

"Patsy, how is it with you?"

"I don't think you need to ask, chief."

"No. Only it is a little more dangerous for you than for Chick. You are known now as the man Slick, and if they should get you into that trial-room again it would be a case of U. P."

"All the same, I don't want to be left behind."

"Nor do I wish to leave you behind. Get ready, then, both of you, for to-night. I don't believe it will be necessary that we should wear any sort of disguise, for, once seen, it won't make much difference how we look. But I think we can avoid being seen."

"If Scotty has not laid a plant for you," suggested Chick.

"He hasn't done that, I am sure. If anything should happen that I don't show up here before ten to-night, meet me at midnight—no, at one—at O'Brien's corner, near Mulvaney's."

They agreed, and he hurried to Moran's office.

It was a little after noon when he got there, and found Moran seated in his chair at the desk in a brown study.

"What's the matter, Robert?" he said to him.

"This," replied Moran, passing over a letter that was open on the desk before him; and Nick took it, and read:

"DEAR RED: So sorry that you have reformed. I can't get it off my mind. I must tell you what I did

after leaving you. I telephoned for Scotty, and told him the whole thing. We agreed that we would say nothing about your case to the others until after Scotty had talked it over with you. I suppose he has done so by this time, and you will know more about it than I do by now; but here it is after four in the morning, and Scotty has not shown up, and I confess that I am feeling worried.

"You see, he was to take your trail, and follow you wherever you went. I clean forgot what a beastly temper you have, and I remember now what an infernal one Scotty has, so I make it out that you have had a go at each other, and that one of you is hurt.

"Well, if that is so, it can't be helped; only I want to say this to you: If, when you get this letter, you will come to me here and have a talk all about it, I won't say a word about you, at least until after I have seen you. But if you don't—if I don't see you before midnight, or at least by half-past one o'clock, then I'll tell the whole gang, and it will be up to them—and you. Yours truly,

MUL."

That was the letter, and it was characteristic throughout. It read very much as the man talked.

"What do you think of it, Nick?" asked Moran, when the detective had finished reading it.

"I think the heart of the man rather spoke there," replied the detective. "I think another thing, too."

"What is it?"

"I think that Mulvaney will have found that he could not keep as usual, last night—or this morning, rather—and that he is about due to arrive here now."

"*What!*"

"That is what I think."

"That he will come here to-day?"

"Yes. That he is on his way here now. He will have gotten up rather earlier, in order to do so, and be back at his place at his accustomed time. He is about due here now."

"But what will he wish to come here to-day for?"

"To find out about that meeting between you and Scotty. If Scotty hasn't shown up—and we know he won't—by the time Mul gets up he'll be dead anxious to see you; and he'll do it, too."

"I'm glad you're here."

"My dear Moran—or shall I call you Red for the time being—you seem to have lost your nerve strangely since you altered your mode of life."

"Possibly I have."

"Who occupies that office there?" asked the detective, pointing toward a door at one side of the room.

"It belongs to this suite, but I have sublet it; that is why I have a flat desk against the door."

"Is anybody in there now?"

"No; Cotton has gone to the country for a vacation, he said."

"Is there an entrance from the hall?"

"Yes."

"Have you the key to it?"

"Yes. Cotton left it with me."

"Then give it to me. Have you, also, a key to this door between the rooms?"

"No; Cotton has that one."

"Anyhow, there is a transom. I can open that."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going into that room to await the arrival of Mulvaney."

"You seem to be mighty sure that he will come."

"I am. I know the man. He will be here very soon, or I will call myself a fool."

"What shall I say to him about last night?"

"I don't know. Let circumstances decide for you."

"I ought to arrange some story to tell him."

"You are an awfully poor liar, Moran, so stick to the truth if you have to tell it. Avoid it as long as you can, but tell it if you are cornered."

"Won't that spoil all your plans?"

"I won't let it. Come along with me to the next room. We will finish our talk there, if there is anything more to say. I don't want Mul to catch me here."

Moran followed the detective to the next room and they entered and closed the door after them. Then Nick arranged the transom over the connecting doors so that he could hear what passed in the adjoining room, but he did not move it enough so that the fact would be noticed.

He had just completed this arrangement when a heavy step sounded in the hall, and they heard the door of Moran's office thrown open, and the heavy voice of Mulvaney call out:

"Where are ye, Red?"

"Go back," whispered Nick; and Moran hurried back to his own office, while Nick Carter leaped upon the desk in that adjoining one, and assumed a position where he could both see and hear.

He saw Moran enter the room and Mulvaney turn and face him; and at once the big man demanded:

"Where is Scotty?"

"Eh? What's that?" asked Moran, in return.

"Where is Scotty, I say? Where is he?"

"How should I know where Scotty is?"

"You do know. Don't you lie to me. Where is he?"

"You ought to be in a better position to know where he is than I," said Moran weakly, but smiling.

"Look here, Red, I'll have it out of ye somehow. Where is Scotty?"

"Suppose I tell you to go to the devil and find out, then what?"

"Well, that's different. It shows that you are the same old Red that you used to be if you say that. Didn't you get a letter from me to-day?"

"Yes."

"Did you see Scotty last night?"

"I can tell you quite truthfully that I did not, Mul."

"Now, you're lying."

"I'm not. I'm telling you the exact truth. I did not see Scotty last night, or if I did, I did not know him, and was not aware that it was he."

"Go and tell that to the marines."

"I'm telling it to you."

"It's a lie, I tell you."

"It's the truth."

"But you know where he is. You as much as said so just now."

"Maybe I do, and maybe I do not. Anyhow, I shall not answer the question."

"Then I'll peach on you, by thunder!"

"Do it. I can take care of myself. I'm not afraid of the whole biling of you, down there at that infernal roost of yours. If you go out of here swearing that you'll peach on me, I will go straight from here to police headquarters and tell the whole thing I know about you and the place you run. If you threaten me, I can threaten you, as well. And if I do tell, I will make a clean sweep of it. Now, you know my position."

All the time he had been talking Mulvaney's eyes were growing smaller and more fierce; and now he took a step nearer to Moran, and said between his teeth:

"You would do that, would ye?"

"Yes, I would."

Nick, watching and listening, saw that Mulvaney could be a dangerous man, indeed, if he so chose, and he trembled for what Moran would say or do next.

"I guess, maybe," said Mulvaney quietly—it was a dangerous quiet, Nick thought—"that you don't know me very well, Red."

"I know enough about you."

"It isn't generally considered a safe thing to threaten me."

"You threatened me, so I give you one back for it."

"You'll be thinking better of what you said just now, won't you?"

"No, I won't."

All the time Mulvaney had been moving a little nearer to Moran; and now, with that last answer from him, the big fellow leaped forward suddenly, and so quickly that Moran was totally unprepared for it.

As he sprang, something flashed in his hand, and the next instant Nick could see the two men struggling together, for Moran had succeeded in grasping Mulvaney's wrist—the wrist of the hand that held the knife, and he was warding off the death-blow that was threatened as best he could.

The detective knew that the struggle could not last long.

He knew that Moran was no match for the big man, who, although he seemed all fat, was really all muscle.

Instantly, he leaped from the desk where he stood and dashed out at the door of the small office where he had been concealed, and thence he ran with all speed toward the scene of the fight that was going on.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIGHT WITH MULVANEY.

Nick Carter was only just in time when he leaped into the room where Moran and Mulvaney were fighting, for in another moment the big man must have been victorious over his lesser adversary.

But Moran had fought sturdily so far.

He was not of the stuff that gives up easily, and, although he must have known that he was overmatched and outclassed, still he fought on with that dogged determination which had made him what he was.

When Nick dashed into the room Mulvaney had just forced Moran to the floor, and at the very instant when the detective leaped forward, he wrenched his hand free and raised the knife to put an end forever to the struggles of Moran.

But Nick Carter seized the hand ere it could descend, and with his own gigantic strength he wrenched

the wrist around until the knife fell from the frenzied grasp, and Mulvaney himself sank back with a groan.

Moran had used the last strength of which he was possessed, also.

There was not another ounce of resistance left in him, and as he felt the grasp upon him relax, he, too, sank backward, with a sigh of relief, for he knew that rescue had come in the form of his friend, who had been waiting and watching in the adjoining room.

But Mulvaney was not overdone, if Moran was.

He was not even winded, and when the seizure of his wrist relaxed he uttered a snarl of rage, and leaped forward again, this time full at the detective's throat.

The man seemed now to be totally beside himself. He appeared to have lost that degree of calmness for which he had been justly celebrated among his associates. All that was in him of rage seemed to be aroused, and now he was suddenly become a maniac who only sought to kill.

He did not in the least know who Nick Carter was. He had never seen him, and, of course, did not expect to encounter him there.

If he thought about it at all, it was to suppose that some passing stranger had heard the sound of the struggle from the hallway of the building, and had rushed in upon them while they were fighting.

But it made no difference to him who the man might be.

He had interfered in what did not concern him, and that was enough. He should die, if Mulvaney could kill him.

Probably it would have been no different had he known that it was Nick Carter who confronted him, for his rage was so great that he would have attacked any man, or any three or four men, for that matter.

Mulvaney weighed at that time upward of three hundred pounds; and with all that enormous weight he was as quick as a cat and as strong as a bull.

He turned, as has been said, upon the detective with a snarl of rage, and leaped toward him with arms extended, as if he would crush him in that gigantic embrace.

But instead of seizing, as he had supposed he would, the man who had dared to attack him, he received a blow instead, straight between the eyes, which sent him staggering backward, and which would have sent a smaller man to the floor.

It only dazed and blinded him for an instant, however, for he instantly returned to the attack, now utterly beside himself.

Again the detective struck him a terrible blow, but this time, as if he had expected and was prepared for it, Mulvaney only blinked; and then he managed to seize the detective in his terrible grip.

It was then that the detective showed for once in his experience the full extent of that wonderful strength he possessed.

When he felt the awful muscles of Mulvaney close around him, he nerved himself for a great effort. Stooping, then, he seized his opponent around the legs, and, shutting his teeth together, he raised that huge bulk clear of the floor, and actually threw the man over his head, so that he dropped with a jar that almost shook the building behind Nick Carter.

And, instantly, when the detective threw the man, he wheeled around and leaped upon him; and so Mulvaney found himself prone upon the floor, with a strange man seated astride of him, and with his late opponent, Moran, standing smilingly near, looking down upon them.

He could not understand it.

He had never in his life been worsted in a fight before.

Always he had been accustomed to seeing men go down before him, almost without a struggle, and now to have actually been thrown over another man's head, and that man so much smaller than he—it was not to be believed.

And yet it was true.

The man seated upon him was actually smiling, too, and Mulvaney could only grunt his disapproval of the whole thing.

"Who the devil are you?" he gasped presently.

"Nick Carter," replied the detective quietly.

"*What?*" shouted the prone man.

"That's what," replied the detective, smiling again upon his prostrate foe.

"Are *you* Nick Carter?"

"Yes."

"Well—I'll—be—hanged!"

"I think you will—ultimately. There doesn't seem to be any doubt of that. It's all fixed for you, Mul, and you couldn't escape it if you tried."

"I'd like to know how the blazes you pretend to know so much about me," muttered the man who now seemed

to have been restored to his natural self, which was always placid, and always self-contained.

Instantly, the light of mischief shone in the detective's eyes, and, at once adopting the voice and the manner of speech of Ruddy Mike, he exclaimed:

"Sure, an' don't ye be afther rememberin' me, at all, at all, Mul? Faith, but you're quick to forget your ould fri'nds, so ye are!"

"For the love of Heaven!" exclaimed Mulvaney. "Is it you, Ruddy?"

"That same," replied Nick, with a grin.

"Then, where the divil is Nick Carter, I'm wanting to know."

"Sure, he's here, too, Mul."

"One and the same, Ruddy?"

"Wan and the same, Mul."

"Then I suppose I'm under arrest, am I?"

"It looks like it, Mul."

"What's the charge?"

"There are about forty of them, more or less, I'm thinking. Just now it's the charge of fighting; the charge of attacking a man in his own office, with a knife, for all the world as if you intended to kill him, when it's me that knows ye were only playing."

"Oh, stop your jollying, Ruddy, and tell me the truth. Have I got to go to limbo?"

"That depends, Mul, upon how much good sense you show."

"Sure, Ruddy, I was always celebrated for my good sense."

"We'll see about that later."

"What is it you want me to do?"

"I haven't quite decided that point, as yet."

"When ye do, will ye let me know?"

"I sure will."

"And in the meantime what am I to do?"

"You are to lie quietly where you are, for at the first break for liberty you will have to go to the station-house, and you know as well as I what it is likely to be after that."

"Sure, I do."

"So, will you keep quiet, and do as I tell you?"

"I will."

"You realize that you couldn't get away if you tried, don't you?"

"I do that."

"Then I won't have to put the irons on you, or do anything of that sort?"

"No, ye won't. But will you tell me one thing, Misther Carter?"

"It depends on what it is."

"Will you be afther telling me where is Scotty?"

"Scotty? Yes. Scotty is at my house, enjoying life to his heart's content."

"He ain't injured?"

"Not a hair of his head."

"Then that makes me feel easier. And, say, you, Red, I apologize for that attack I made upon you. Sure, I lost me temper, and it's the first time in over twenty years. I'm always afraid of that temper of mine, for when it gets the best of me I don't know what I do. I see red at such times."

"You sure saw Red that time," laughed the detective; "and you tried to kill him."

"I did, for a fact, and it's sorry I am for it. Will you forgive me, Red?"

"Certainly."

"There! I feel easier now. Ruddy—I mean Mr. Carter—you haven't got anything particular against me, personally, have you?"

"Nothing at all, Mul," replied the detective. "You have been a bad man all your life, and you have a lot of sins to answer for, but I'll tell you this, truly, it is not you that I am after in this affair, and if you're content to do as I ask you, you will be none the worse for your acquaintance with me."

"Faith, I'm your slave from this moment, Ruddy."

"I don't think you had better call me Ruddy any more. Call me Carter, if you like."

"I'll do that, too. But, I say!"

"Well?"

"You're not going to ask me to betray any of the boys, are you?"

"No. I won't ask you to do a thing that will interfere with that delicately constituted conscience of yours. You may rely upon that."

"Then it's me for yours. Sure, you've only to command me to be obeyed—and, faith, I never thought I'd consent to crawl in this manner."

"We crawl when we cannot walk, Mul; and just now I have taken your feet from under you."

"You sure have."

"How many more, besides you and Scotty know about Moran, here?" asked the detective.

"Not a soul, as far as I know."

"Do you mean that you told nobody but Scotty?"

"That's exactly what I do mean."

"What time are you in the habit of showing up down at your place? What time of day, I mean?"

"Anywhere from three in the afternoon to nine at night. I'm always there by nine. I was never later than that since I have had the place."

"Does anybody down there know where you intended going to-day?"

"Not a soul among them. I said that I was going down-town on business, that's all."

"Did you say anything about what time you might be expected to return?"

"Not a word."

"So if you are there by dark it will be all right?"

"Yes."

"Very good. Then I think I can promise you that you will be there by dark, running your own place, as usual, always provided that you make me certain promises that I shall exact of you."

CHAPTER X.

THE GREATEST CRIMINAL OF THEM ALL.

But the experiences that were to be had in that particular office were not past yet.

It was at this juncture that Moran happened to step forward to close the door into the hall, which the detective had left open when he entered the room so hastily, and as he did so he saw a man leave the elevator at the far end of the corridor, and stop there a moment to study the directory-board that hung against the wall.

He recognized Peters, another one of the crooks who frequented Mulvaney's Cover; recognized him instantly, and as quickly darted back again into the room.

"Nick," he exclaimed. "Peters is out there, and he is looking for this office."

The detective turned threatening eyes upon Mulvaney, but that individual, as if he knew what the expression meant, replied to the unasked question.

"I told you the truth," he said. "I haven't told a soul about Red. I'll swear to it. If Peters is out there, sure he must have followed me when I left my place to-day, and he has got tired of waiting outside for me to come out. What's that room in there?" he asked, pointing toward a door.

"It is my private office," replied Moran.

"Then you stay here and receive Peters, if he comes in here, and let Carter and me hide in that room till he has gone away. Come on, Carter, if you're willing."

Nick followed him into the small room, and they closed the door behind them, leaving only a crack of it open, so that they could both see and hear; and Nick remained close to the door, prepared for any emergency that might arise.

It was some time before Peters entered the office; so long a time that they all began to think that he was not coming there at all, and that it was only an accident that he happened to be in the building at all.

But he did enter at last; and he stopped just inside the door and glanced around him, taking in everything he saw with that coolness for which he was famed among his fellows.

He saw and recognized Moran as Red, instantly, but not a change of expression betokened his surprise, if he felt any.

He glanced coolly at the young lawyer, as if studying him, and then, in a tone that was almost without expression, he asked:

"Where's Mul, Red?"

"He left the room a few moments before you entered it," replied Moran, as naturally as the other man had spoken.

"He was here, then?"

"Yes."

"To see you? I mean, did he come here on purpose to see you, or did he discover you by accident, as I have done?"

"He came here purposely to see me."

"Then he must have known that you had a law-office here, under a new name. Did he?"

"Yes."

"How long has he known it?"

"Since yesterday."

"He knew it last night, when he was down there at the Cover with us fellows? Are you sure of that?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. I'll ask Mul to explain something about that when next I see him;" and inside the other room Nick felt Mulvaney shudder in the grasp he held on his arm.

"Now, Red," continued Peters, "I'll ask you something about yourself. I suppose you know that I have

been promoted to the Third Degree, and have a right to ask you any questions I wish?"

"I didn't know it; but I'll take your word for it," replied Moran, whose only desire in that conversation was to kill time, and to keep Peters on the safe side of conduct, if possible.

"You may take it. Do you also know that under the rules you are compelled to answer all the questions I shall ask?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been here practising law?"

"Several months."

"Why have you kept it a secret from the order?"

"Because I thought it best to do so."

"Why?"

"I had determined to lead an honest life. I have given up all forms of graft and theft, and cut the past totally out."

"Is that straight?"

"Yes."

"Have you withdrawn from the order?"

"No. In spirit I have; but in fact I have not."

"Doesn't it amount to the same thing?"

"Perhaps."

"Don't you know what the penalty is?"

"Yes."

"Death."

"Yes."

"Are you willing to stand trial and take the consequences, whatever they may be?"

"I don't know about that."

"Don't you know that you will have to do it?"

"I suppose so, if they can force me to do it."

"You know they can."

"Possibly."

"Are you willing to remain as you are, and still remain a member of the order, to stand by the boys and fight for them when they are in trouble?"

"I cannot answer that at once."

"I demand an answer."

"Then I shall be obliged to answer No."

"Do you know what that reply means?"

"Yes."

"Red, have you been against us from the first?"

"No."

"When you first came here from Boston were you what you represented yourself to be, or were you at that time either a fly cop or a stool-pigeon?"

"Neither. I was just what I said I was."

"A burglar, and a good one at that."

"I was so counted."

"What made you go wrong?"

"I didn't go wrong. I went right."

"What made you change?"

"Circumstances."

"That answer won't do."

"It will have to suffice, for I can answer the question in no other way."

"Do you know what the boys have said about you since that night?"

"I think you had better tell me."

"They have said that you were a stool-pigeon; that you were acting as an assistant to Nick Carter, and were a traitor to the order. Is that true?"

"It was not true then."

"Is it true now?"

"It is true that I count Nick Carter as one of the best friends I ever had. It is true that I see him almost daily. It is true that he had much to do with my change of life; but it is not true that I have been a traitor to the order in any way, for I have never done a thing against it—and Nick Carter would never ask me to betray one of the men in it."

"That's a lie, Red."

Moran shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Of course," he said, "I cannot argue with you on any such premises. I can only reply that in making that statement, it is yourself who is the liar."

"By heavens! but I won't lose my temper. You are the only man who ever dared to call me that to my face."

"I am not afraid of you, Peters. You might as well understand that at once."

"Are you alone here, Red?"

"No; a man who calls himself Peters is with me."

"Are you otherwise alone?"

"Look around for yourself and answer the question as you see fit."

"Who is in that room there?"

"Two friends of mine."

"Is Nick Carter one of them?"

"Yes."

Instantly Peters leaped backward toward the door that opened upon the hall, and, while he moved, he drew two pistols from his pockets, so that at once Moran found himself looking into the muzzles of them. And Peters,

without the least trace of excitement, said in a low tone, which was, however, perfectly distinct to Nick Carter and Mulvaney:

"I have always wanted to meet up with Nick Carter, and now it seems that I have the opportunity. I hope he can hear what I say, for I want him to understand that if he makes a move to approach me now, you, Red, will drop dead in your tracks about as quick as a bullet can kill you. I won't miss, either. Do you hear that, Nick Carter? Answer, or I will shoot Red now, where he stands."

"Yes; I hear you," replied the detective; and, shoving Mulvaney back out of sight, he opened the door wide, and stood upon the threshold, in full view of Peters.

"So," said the latter, with a curl of his lip, "you are Nick Carter, are you?"

"Yes, I am Nick Carter," replied the detective.

"It is a fine reputation you have earned for yourself, ain't it?"

"I try to live up to it, whatever it is," retorted Nick.

"By chasing down such fellows as I am, eh?"

"Yes."

"And just now you have got it in for the society you call the Criminals' Trust, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you heard me say a moment ago that I had been permitted to join the Third Degree, didn't you?"

"I did."

"Then I am one of your prospective victims, ain't I?"

"I'm afraid you are, Peters."

"And you are going to take me in, now that you've got me here; eh?"

"That is about what I will be obliged to do."

"If I'll submit; eh?"

"You will have to submit," was the quiet reply.

"Will I? Not much! Take that!"

As he uttered the last words, he pulled the triggers of both his pistols at once, for he had the chance of his life to kill the great detective, and he intended to make the most of it.

CHAPTER XI.

NICK CARTER'S WILDEST CHASE.

Only one of the pistols exploded its charge; the other, for some reason, missed fire.

If both bullets had been sent at the detective, it is more than likely that he would have fallen a victim to one of them.

But Moran had foreseen what Peters would do, and at the instant he fired, leaped forward to knock up one or both of the weapons, if he could do so.

He succeeded with one of them, and fortunately with the one that was discharged, so that the only bullet that was actually fired at the detective went wide of the mark, and imbedded itself in the ceiling.

Instantly Peters realized that he had missed, and with a loud curse he hurled the other weapon straight at the detective's head, and, turning, sprang toward the door.

He succeeded in opening it before either of the men could get to him, and he ran out and away along the wide hall as fast as he could go, with Nick Carter sprinting after him.

The office was on the top floor of the building. At the elevator a stairway continued onto the roof, and Peters, always a student of ways and means for getting out of a place, had taken notice of this fact when he left the elevator.

Now he sprinted with all his speed toward that stairway, and reached it far in advance of the detective.

At the top—that is, when he went out upon the roof—he tried to close the door, and in that way to shut off farther pursuit; but the door was bolted back, and there was no time to accomplish it.

Even as he tried, he could see Nick Carter mounting the stairs after him, and so, with a last curse, he turned again and fled across the roof toward the far edge of it.

The building was one of the tall ones down-town in New York. It is true that there were others that were higher in that vicinity, but there were many that were not so high, too; and it seemed, to one on the roof, as if this one was the loftiest of all.

When Peters reached the edge of the roof he turned and faced the detective, who was approaching him rapidly, but who now slowed down, believing that he had his man cornered; and he believed that Peters would fight rather than be caught.

But even he did not realize all of Peter's possibilities.

The man was a daredevil in his way, and now, when he saw the detective so close to him, and understood that it was only a question of seconds when he would have to submit or put up a fight, there on the edge of

that roof, hundreds of feet from the ground, he cast about him for another means of escape.

Suddenly he turned his back sharply upon the detective.

Peters, in looking about him, had discovered two things.

One was that the roof of the adjoining building, while much lower than the one he was on, was still not so very far down. The other was that the janitor's wife, of the other building, had put out all her beds on the roof to air.

There they were below him, offering a nice cushion for him to drop upon if he should dare to make the leap.

He had to decide the question instantly, for already the detective was nearly within reaching distance.

And then, as Nick Carter thrust out a hand to seize upon his prisoner, as he supposed, he saw him take the leap into the air, disappearing downward like a flash, and so passing, for the instant, out of sight.

For a moment the detective was dazed.

To him, from where he stood, it looked as if the man had leaped off into space, and must be dashed to atoms far below; but the next instant he was himself at the edge of the roof, and already Peters was rising to his feet from the mattresses where he had fallen when he leaped.

He paused for an instant and shook his fist at the detective; and then he turned and dashed away toward a door that was on the roof of that other building.

But if he thought he had escaped from Nick Carter he was never more mistaken in his life.

Peters had not taken three steps toward that doorway which would lead him to liberty, ere the detective took the leap after him.

He, too, had seen the mattresses, and had realized in that instant how the thief had so nearly escaped him; and it was necessary that he should not escape.

Now was the time, Nick thought, to put an end forever to the Criminals' Trust—and he made the leap.

He alighted as Peters had done, and rolled over and over before he could regain his feet; to find, when at last he did so, that Peters had disappeared into the building.

But Nick knew where he had gone.

He knew that there was only one way by which he could have gone, and he dashed after him without an instant's loss of time.

He saw Peters at the bottom of the first flight of stairs from the top—the stairs that wound round and round the elevator-shaft; and he dashed after him at once.

There was no time for Peters to stop an elevator and get into it, and Nick did not intend that he should be permitted the time.

And so it became a race round and round that shaft, both men running down the marble stairway, two or three steps at a time, in imminent risk of stumbling and breaking their legs as they descended.

Twice, while the race lasted, Peters lost a little by pausing, thinking that he could have time to enter an elevator; but each time he was compelled to start on again, running as before.

There were seventeen flights of those stairs in that descent, and the two men ran down them all, and they finally dashed out of the building into the street at about the same distance apart as when the race began.

The street was Broadway, as the reader has already guessed, and, as is always the case, it was thronged with people and vehicles of all descriptions.

Into this crowd Peters dashed, and reached a car that for a moment had a clear space and was speeding uptown as fast as it could go.

Nick leaped upon the seat of a carriage beside the driver and seized the reins from his hands, and so dashed on after his prey.

They passed along a block in this manner, and then Nick saw Peters leave the car and dash for the subway entrance, at the Trinity Building.

He reached it and ran down it, Nick after him.

Below, he ran on along toward the Dey Street entrance, and up that again to the street.

Here he crossed Broadway and ran down the stairs at the opposite side; and now Nick realized what the man was trying to do.

The detective could see him feeling in his pockets as he ran—for nickels, doubtless, with which to pay his fare when he passed in at the stations—and it was his hope that he would catch a subway train that was just about to start, so that the detective would be left behind.

He knew that if he could do that he could get off at the next station, and so easily avoid his pursuer.

But Nick gave him no time to do this thing. He pursued so closely that Peters had no opportunity to accomplish it; and so the chase continued up and down subway-stairs.

There were times when men upon the street saw the

chase, and took part in it, but they were quickly out of it, for Peters, with almost uncanny wit, managed to avoid those who would join in the pursuit.

The man finally dashed into the Fulton Street entrance; but he went up the other stairs as soon as he could get to them, and then turned his steps toward the river, down Fulton Street itself.

At Nassau he turned through to Ann, and down that street. At William he turned through again to Beekman, and down that street.

At Gold he turned through again to Platt Street, and thence on down toward the river, for Platt Street narrows almost to an alleyway there.

He crossed Water and Front, and finally arrived at South Street, still several rods in advance of the detective; and into the throng of vehicles that are always there during the busy parts of the day he ran.

He succeeded in crossing the street, and then ran out upon a pier that had in big black letters over it the words, "Bridgeport Line."

The steamer *Bridgeport* was at the dock, preparing to leave.

The gangplank had just been drawn in and the lines cast off so that the steamer could leave the dock, when Peters arrived at it.

Those near-by who saw him, believed that he was a belated passenger, who was determined to catch the boat.

They saw him take a flying-leap into the air and alight safely upon the guard, just outside the rail. They saw him clutch the guard and draw himself in, and finally climb over it upon the deck.

And then they witnessed still another spectacle.

A second man was dashing for the boat.

He, too, leaped into the air—a much longer and more dangerous leap it was than the one the first man had taken.

But he succeeded in making it in much the same manner, for he, too, alighted upon the guard, and pulled himself aboard as the first one had done.

Peters had turned as soon as he gained the deck, and was waiting; and now, as the detective alighted safely, he raised his hand to strike, intending to knock him into the river, and so consummate his escape.

But the second mate of the boat had seen it all.

He was at his post at the gangplank, and when the first of the jumpers raised his arm to strike the second one, he reached out and caught the blow before it could descend—and the next instant Nick Carter was over the rail upon the boat, facing the man he had chased so far and so doggedly.

Peters did not wait to afford an opportunity for explanations.

He sprang instantly for the detective's throat, intending to seize him and choke him, and force him overboard if he could do so.

But Nick Carter met him half-way.

Instead of returning the attack in kind, he took a step to one side and a trifle backward; and then his right hand shot out like the projectile from a catapult, and his fist caught Peters squarely where he intended the blow to land.

Peters, who had come so near to escaping, was sent flying backward as if he had been pushed by a mighty arm; and when he struck the deck Nick was on top of him; and before he could make a move to recover himself, the detective had snapped handcuffs on his wrists, and the redoubtable Peters was a prisoner at last.

It had been a long chase and a hard one; but it was successful at the end.

Explanations were called for, of course, for at once a crowd gathered around the two, and they were headed by the second mate, who was still rather dazed by all that had happened.

But Nick simply announced who he was, and proclaimed Peters for what he was.

"This boat stops at Twenty-third Street," he said. "I will get off there with my prisoner."

And he did.

As soon as he was ashore he gave Peters in charge of two policemen, who were there to take him to the station-house, and then he hurried to a telephone, where he called up Moran at his office and told him where he was.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST SHOW AT MULVANEY'S.

That night Nick Carter made his famous descent upon Mulvaney's Cover.

It has been told about so completely in the newspapers that we need make only a reference to it here.

With the plans drawn for him by Scotty, and with the added information that Mulvaney himself supplied, the detective, with his two assistants, entered the place and

hid themselves among the maze of secret passages and "getaways" with which the old house was veined.

Thus concealed, they were enabled to hear all the proceeding when the men got together.

Nick had made previous arrangements with the police at headquarters, so that he had the building entirely surrounded by a force of reserves through which no one of the criminals who were there could escape; and at last, when all was in readiness, and when all the thieves were gathered together in the big room at the back, Nick coolly opened a small door in the wall—a door that was formed of a sliding-panel—and stepped out among them.

For a moment they were dazed by his sudden appearance among them, for they knew instinctively who he was; and then, as with one accord, they leaped to their feet, and many of them attempted to draw weapons.

Some of them actually succeeded in doing so; but all the while Nick Carter stood with folded arms before them, smiling as if his presence there were a natural thing.

"Don't shoot," he said calmly. "It would not do any of you the slightest good. Even if you should kill me, and my two friends who are behind me, it would not benefit you in the least, for there are half a hundred bluecoats surrounding you now, and you cannot escape. You are all my prisoners."

There was a chorus of curses at this, and through it all Nick remained smiling upon them.

"It won't do you any good to swear," he said placidly. "You are prisoners. Some of you I don't want; but there are some here whom I do want. I will weed you out presently."

Chris Conroy, one of the number, stepped forward a pace and stood looking at the detective.

"Are you Nick Carter?" he demanded.

"Yes," replied the detective.

"Then I reckon that we give in. There ain't no use in putting up a fight, is there?"

"Not the slightest."

Conroy turned to the others:

"What do you say, pals?" he demanded of them. "It will go easier with us if we take our medicine. How about it?"

There were grumblings on every hand, but the final decision was that they would surrender, and so presently the police were admitted to the place, and then Nick told off the names of those among them that he wanted.

These were handcuffed, one by one, and led away in charge of an officer, until all that the detective had determined to arrest were captured.

The rest of them he caused to be grouped in one corner of the room; and when the prisoners were taken away, he said to these last:

"Now, I have something to say, and I want you to listen to me."

"We will," replied one of them, who constituted himself spokesman for all.

"There isn't one of you against whom I could not bring a charge and send away for a good long term, and I guess you know that."

"Yes; we know that."

"For reasons of my own I have decided that it is not necessary to do that. Those of you who remain in this room I have decided to set at liberty."

"Hurray!"

"Shut up till I get through."

"All right, Mr. Carter."

"But I know all of you to a man. I know who you are, and what you are. I could send you all away if I chose to do so, couldn't I?"

"We believe you could."

"Well, I have decided to let those who remain here go their several ways in peace; but there is a condition attached to it; there is a string tied to it."

"What's the string, boss?"

"New York is not a healthy place for you. I want you to get out of it."

"We'll go. We'll promise. I'll promise for the bunch, boss."

"I don't care much about your promises, but I'll tell you what will happen to you if you do not get out."

"Well, sir?"

"Those of you whom I catch in New York after twenty-four hours from now I will send away for all the time I can induce a judge to give them; those of you who attempt to have anything more to do with a secret society among you that is called the Order of the Python will get no mercy from me, ever."

"I guess we've had about enough of that order," shouted one of the men in the group. "It has only got us into trouble from the start, and was all for the benefit of a few leaders."

"You will find that all trusts are like that; the Criminals' Trust was not different in any respect, and was quite as honorable as some of the others. But do you

understand me? There must be no more of the Python business."

"Yes; we've got it down. It'll keep, too."

"See that it does. Now, there is another thing."

"Well, sir, what is it?"

"There used to be a man among you here whom you called Red Morgan. Do you remember him?"

"We sure do."

"He has given up graft, and he is living an honest life. He is practising law down in lower Broadway. Scotty and Peters, and a few others, have tried to 'do' him for that—for being honest, I mean; and they are in prison now."

"That's what!"

"I want to say to you that Mr. Moran, whom you used to know as Red, is under my protection, and that the first one of you who attempts to do him dirt in any way will have me after him, and I will never let up on him till I get him. You know that I am a man of my word, and that I will keep it."

"That we do."

"You can go to him with your law business, if you want to, and you'll find him square all the time; but don't try any funny business in that quarter unless you want to get me after you."

"We hear that, all right."

"See to it that you heed it, also. Now, another thing."

"All right, Mr. Carter."

"This place is going out of business. Mulvaney's Cover ceases to exist to-night."

"What about Mulvaney?"

"Mulvaney may speak for himself. He is here to do so. Mulvaney, come here!"

Big Mulvaney came forward from beyond the doorway by which the detective had entered the room, and stood for a moment smiling down upon his former associates.

"Boys," he said, "Mr. Carter has told you what is what. I have left the crooked paths, and it's me for another country and an honest life hereafter. I'm going out to Australia to go in with Black Morgan, who is already there. I have given orders this afternoon to have this place torn out, and made over into tenement-houses. All the old secret passages will be destroyed, so there won't be any cover here no more. Are you on?"

"We're on."

"I'm not going to preach to you, because I'm not given that way, but I will say that it's the honest graft for mine hereafter. Carter here has been on the level all the time. I liked him when he first showed up here, and made me and you believe that he was Ruddy Mike. I think it was his honesty that I liked. Anyhow, I have made up my mind to be as honest as I can for the rest of my life, and I advise you all to do the same."

"Will you hear that?" groaned one of the men.

"It is true," insisted Mulvaney. "I'm not preaching, but if you'll stay honest you'll keep out of prison; and if you keep out of prison you won't have any grudge coming against the other people in the world. The world owes you a living, all right, but you owe it to the world to work for it. Don't forget that."

"What about Scotty?"

"Scotty is for honest graft, too. Nick Carter has reformed him also."

"What about Peters?"

"Peters is an unruly devil who never forgives, and I'm afraid that he will give Mr. Carter some trouble yet. So I call upon you all to stand for Carter, if he does; for, after all, the detective has treated you white to-night. Who'll deny that?"

"Nobody, I guess."

"That's all. I'll step down and out now."

The following day Nick Carter, with Chick and Patsy, called at Moran's office in the afternoon, and the detective said laughingly:

"I think, now, that you can continue business at the old stand, don't you, Robert?"

"It would seem so—yes. But, Nick, I want to warn you of one thing."

"What is that?"

"Peters sent me word to-day that he had heard all about what occurred last night. How he got the information I don't know; but he said that he would break jail in spite of all that could be done to hold him, and that when he got out he would 'do' you and Patsy and me, if it was all he ever accomplished in the world."

"He sent me the same message," replied the detective. "But I don't think he will get out this time."

"He may."

"Then we won't cross any bridges till we come to them."

THE END.

The next number (573) will contain "Peters, the Shrewd Crook; or, Nick Carter's Malignant Foe."

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NEW YORK, December 14, 1907.

TERMS TO NICK CARTER WEEKLY MAIL SUBSCRIBERS.

(*Postage Free.*)

Single Copies or Back Numbers, 5c. Each.

3 months	65c.	One year	$2.50
4 months	85c.	2 copies one year	4.00
6 months	$1.25	1 copy two years	4.00

How to Send Money—By post-office or express money order, registered letter, bank check or draft, at our risk. At your own risk if sent by currency, coin, or postage stamps in ordinary letter.

Receipts—Receipt of your remittance is acknowledged by proper change of number on your label. If not correct you have not been properly credited, and should let us know at once.

OSMOND G. SMITH, GEORGE C. SMITH, *Proprietors.*

STREET & SMITH, Publishers,
79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City.

TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

In Portland, Oregon, there is a large part of the town devoted to the Chinese population, but the Chinatown proper used to be in San Francisco. This quarter of San Francisco contained over twenty thousand Chinese, living and following their separate avocations as in China itself. Not being citizens of the United States, and, therefore, having no vote, they formed a separate community of their own nationality, and lived entirely in the district allotted to them by the city. They were, of course, amenable to the laws of the State of California, and under strict police supervision, detectives being largely employed to watch them day and night. This was very necessary, as quarrels were plentiful and violent, owing to business jealousies and private ambition, and murder was not infrequent. Secret societies were numerous, the most notable being that known as the "Highbinders," who are still very powerful. A Chinaman is sometimes, for some reason, under the ban of these cliques, and is quietly notified he must return to China, or be assassinated, and he has to sell out his business at any loss and leave inside of twenty-four hours. Some of the rich men, who have enemies, actually have been known to wear armor under their silk robes, and carry a perfect arsenal of revolvers and knives. These Chinese have their peculiar shops, where the necessaries of life are sold. Their butchers' shops are not inviting in appearance; they seem to revel in very fat pork, and sausages, chickens, and fish, stretched on a board—what they call "planked" for broiling, and they grow their own odd-looking vegetables, with very unpronounceable names; and, of course, tea-shops largely abound.

Many of these merchants are very wealthy, and when they have accumulated what they think enough, they in all cases return to their native land, and often their bodies, after death, are sent to the Celestial land for burial.

You notice one remarkable fact—the absence almost of women and children. Very rarely does the Chinaman bring his wife or family with him to the United States; he leaves them behind till he can return home with some dollars. Although having none of the benefits of citizenship, as regards political life, he nevertheless considers himself "Allee samee 'Melican man." A birth in Chinatown entails a general festivity, owing to its rare occurrence.

* * * *

Many of the women are very stout, and, with their hair plastered on their brows and cheeks in fantastic shapes, look anything but inviting. You see the mandarin, with his gold button, and his bright silk clothes, and the different grades of life and caste, down to the dirty, ill-smelling coolie. They live in very small apartments, and you wonder how thousands of people can possibly be crammed into such a small quarter of the city. Their sleeping-quarters resemble very much the steerage of our huge steamers—one bunk over another, and when you see perhaps eight or ten people in two very small rooms, and the inevitable small table, with the little spirit-lamp, the pipe, and the opium-jar, you can imagine that it is not the life you would yourself prefer. They have some very handsome restaurants, elaborate with carving and inlaid woods. Here you can learn to manipulate the "chop-sticks," and drink magnificent tea in cups of the most delicate china; and if you are fond of stewed chicken and rice, well seasoned with currie, you get it here to your heart's content, and at very moderate prices. The guide you usually require to show you round generally puts in his pocket all you happen to leave on the table in the way of fruits, nuts, etc., as a douceur. The tea is usually made by immersing twigs of the plant in a cup with a cover, to which you add hot water. The tea can be bought at four cents per pound, and is very delicious.

The "joss-house" is the next point of interest. These places of worship are often gained by ascending a flight of stairs, such as we find at the gallery entrance of our cheap theaters. They are carefully guarded, and in a small room you find yourself face to face with an immense bronze idol, inlaid with precious stones and metals. On either side of this god are smaller idols made of papier-mâché, contrasting curiously by their bright color with the somber massiveness of the larger idol. The attendant supplies you with small perfumed sticks, which you light as an offering on the altar, at the nominal price of one dollar.

* * * *

To any one who has not visited a Chinese theater, it is something for them to look forward to. The visitors are seated on chairs on either side of the stage, which is perfectly bare of any scenery; the band, consisting of various string instruments and "tom-toms," is placed at the back of the stage, a table and a few chairs comprising all the stage properties. No females are employed as actresses, the men taking such parts. The dresses are elaborate, and very richly embroidered in gold and silver. One play usually runs some weeks, or even months, and when the writer visited the principal theater the manager apologized for it being a new play, that had as yet only run five nights, and so was not in the height of its popularity. A curious sight is presented to the visitor as he sits facing the audience. The oil-lamps show a dim light, and the monotonous coloring of the dresses, the same vacant look on all the faces of the audi-

ence, the hair brushed back, and the long pigtails have a peculiar fascination. One actor, who played the leading female part, received a salary of three thousand dollars a year, and was not allowed to leave the theater during the run of the piece. His room was a cellarlike place, with a small grating for light and air, and here he passed his life.

Some years ago gambling was indulged in to an immense extent. Underground passages were built of solid masonry, protected by iron doors, so that the police could not enter; but the authorities ended all that, and before the great fire in San Francisco you could see the iron doors lying useless on the ground. Still, the Chinese gamble extensively in their peculiar method. These underground places, in Portland, are now used as opium-dens. In one place I saw a man of nearly eighty-five years of age, who had lived in one of these cellars for many years, smoking his opium and dreaming his existence away.

The Imperial diamond is the property of a powerful and wealthy syndicate. In the official description of this stone, it is described as "the largest and most beautiful among celebrated and historical diamonds."

The original weight of the Imperial diamond in its rough state was 457 carats. From this block a portion of 45 carats was at once detached, and cut into a brilliant of 20 carats, which was sold long ago. The remaining block of 412 carats was sent to Amsterdam about ten years ago, where, under the personal direction of three of the first lapidaries of the town, it was cut down to its present size of 180 carats. It is stated that the Queen of Holland, now queen-regent, was present when the first facet was cut, and that the whole cutting of the stone occupied eighteen months.

The Imperial diamond was prominently exhibited at the Paris Exhibition, where special measures were taken for its safe custody, as, for instance, the table on which it was placed being lowered into the ground at night and protected by an iron door.

THE REFORMED CROOK.

BY JABEZ BALFOUR.

"It's a mistake to suppose that crooks—I mean those of the first rank—are habitually unmethodical and unbusinesslike," said Holt, the reformed burglar. "When you're spending the plunder of one successful job, you've got to be thinking about the next, and as very often a trifle leads to big results, it doesn't do to neglect anything, however small or unlikely. Take this letter, for instance, that I pinched from the actress' agent. It was apparently worthless. It related to a matter of business of the most trivial nature, with which I had nothing to do, and yet, for all that, it was worth something like $125,000.

"I made an appointment with Shinburn in order to show him the letter. I was at the agreed place, near Golden Square, about midnight. He was waiting for me. I nodded, sat down beside him, and, drawing the letter out of my pocket, handed it to him.

"Quite three minutes went over before he broke the silence, and in the meantime he had been scrutinizing the handwriting through a magnifying-glass.

"'We'll pull this job off right away,' he whispered. 'The writing's easy to imitate, and, as I happen to know the lady is starting for the Continent to-morrow, and will be away quite six weeks, we've got a splendid chance. But you've all your work before you. First, find out where she banks; second, whether she's deposited her jewels with her bankers; third, get, at any cost, a sheet of note-paper with her heading and monogram. I can only give you three days. I've got the keystone in the shape of this.'

"He tapped his breast pocket, where he had placed the letter I had given him.

"He was intimate with the most expert forger of that day, and the whole thing, as will be seen, depended upon a forgery.

"'I'll take it on, Max. I'll do my best. You may rely on me.'

"Early next morning I hung about the lady's house. A butcher's cart drew up at the door. I took a note of the name. The servant-girl who opened the door was in no hurry to give an order to the butcher's man, and presently she was joined by a stouter and older woman, probably a cook. That butcher's man wasted quite twenty minutes of his master's time in flirtation. I didn't object. It told me that the two women were the only occupants of the house.

"I sauntered to the butcher's shop. I pretended to be the actress' brother, and to represent that she had written to me saying that she had lost her check-book, and was afraid that if it fell into the hands of dishonest persons they might, by forging her signature, induce tradesmen in the neighborhood to cash the checks. She had, in consequence, asked me to warn the tradesmen with whom she dealt.

"And I went away with the name of the lady's bankers. Within an hour I was at the actress' house. This time I represented myself to be a clerk in the employ of a well-known jeweler in Bond Street. I had in my hand a neat little parcel, which might very well contain the bracelet which I had brought for Mrs. Blank, adding that I was to take back one for certain alterations.

"'But you can't,' said the maid. 'Mrs. Blank is abroad, and all her jewels are at her bankers.'

"In that case it's no use leaving this bracelet. Probably she'll write to our firm, or we can write to her if you can give us the address abroad, or, better still, if you'll allow me, I'll write her a line, which you can include with her other letters when you send them. That will show her the firm have attended to her wishes.'

"The girl agreed at once to this perfectly reasonable request, and ushered me into a room on the right. I hadn't the slightest difficulty, while apparently concocting my letter, in abstracting half a dozen sheets of paper and envelopes bearing the lady's monogram. I solemnly folded my note, thanked the girl, begged her to send it on without fail, and took my departure.

"I fully anticipated Shinburn would have congratulated me on my success, for I had done far better than I could have hoped for; but when I put the sheets of paper in his hand, and told him that the lady's jewels were in the keeping of a certain banking-firm, he said very little.

"He took away the paper and envelopes, and we ar-

ranged to meet at the same place the following evening. When I saw him again he was as tacitturn as before. His instructions were concise.

"'You'll drive up to the bank at eleven to-morrow and present this letter. I shall be at Charing Cross post-office at a quarter past, and wait for you. If all goes well you ought to be able to meet me at twenty minutes past. You'd better read the letter.'

"The writing was an admirable imitation of that in the letter I had given him two days before. The signature was perfect. The writer simply requested the manager to hand the jewels to the bearer, whom she named.

"I must confess that I needed all my nerve and coolness when I walked into the bank the following morning and asked to see the manager.

"He hadn't the slightest suspicion the thing was not genuine. Mrs. Blank was a lady whose every movement the public followed with the utmost interest, and it was only natural the manager should talk about her. I had learned a good many facts, more or less trivial, from her agent, and I trotted them out. If he had any doubts I was not an authorized person, this would have dispelled them. I departed with a box of jewels worth intrinsically $25,000. Probably they had cost $200,000.

"Shinburn was awaiting me outside the post-office. He looked a little pale, and, I thought, anxious.

"'Is it all right?'" he whispered.

"I nodded.

"He seemed to give a sigh of relief. We crossed over the road to Grand Hotel buffet and had a drink.

"'I've cabled to Mother Mandelbaum to expect you,' said he. 'She's living in Hamilton, Canada. I can trust her to give a fair price. She'll pay cash down; that's why I prefer to deal with her. If I chose to wait I could get more from Amsterdam, but I want the money. Directly you return, come to this buffet every evening at nine o'clock, and wait an hour.'

"I went to Liverpool that morning, and was in New York in a week, and in Hamilton three days afterward. I interviewed 'Mother Mandelbaum,' one of the most remarkable 'fences,' both for craft and wealth, who ever assisted in the disposal of stolen property, and, as Shinburn said, she paid me with a draft on a well-known London banker. She had accounts in different names in all the principal capitals in Europe, and not one of the banks suspected the calling of their customer.

"At New York, where I stayed for a day on my return journey, I looked at some English papers, and the first thing that caught my eye was an account of a mysterious murder at a café in the West End. One of the servants was found dead, strangled, in the entrance-lobby, and I noticed with a strange thrill that the date of the tragedy was the day after I started for New York—in other words, the limit of the three days fixed by Shinburn within which he said the job must be completed.

"This is all I may venture to say concerning the strange business. When Shinburn met me at the Grand Hotel buffet, which he did the second evening of my waiting for him at the time arranged, he was his customary calm, imperturable self.

"'I am no longer a waiter,' said he, with a cynical smile. 'The hours are long and the pay unremunerative.

"I handed him Mother Mandelbaum's draft, which he cashed the following day, and the division of profits took place in the evening at a dinner in a private room of a German restaurant.

"Shinburn was very quiet, I noticed.

"'In six months' time, Jack Holt,' said Shinburn, after a long pause, 'I shall have done my last job in England. I'm going back to America when I've made my pile. But before I go I mean to have a try at one line of business which, with a bit of luck, is as safe a thing as I know.'

"Shinburn went on to explain himself. There were plenty of opportunities offered by banks for robbery without the necessity for breaking open safes and working in the dead of night.

"Shinburn's lady associate, about whom he was always very reticent, had assisted him in several exploits of this nature in America, and it was part of his project to bring her into play here.

"'I've seen enough of you, Holt, to be certain that I can trust you. All I want you to do is to act as my coachman.'

"I hadn't the slightest objection, and within a month I received a note from him telling me to go to a certain address in Hammersmith, where he would meet me. The house at this address, I found, was empty, and likely to be so.

"Shinburn rented the stable, and here I found a splendidly appointed carriage and a pair of horses.

"I put on a coachman's livery which Shinburn had ready for me, and I drove him to a house in Margaret Street, Cavendish Square, which he entered.

"In about half an hour the door opened and a decrepit old gentleman, bent almost double, came out, leaning on the arm of an elegantly dressed little lady. Of course, the old gentleman was Shinburn.

"I was told to drive to a recently opened branch, in a rising Western suburb, of a well-known and very go-ahead and enterprising bank. Here I drew up, and the lady entered. Presently the local manager came out, leaving the lady behind. The old gentleman, besides being slightly paralyzed, was also very deaf. I could hear what passed. He proposed to open an account, and the manager was explaining the necessary steps.

"Owing to the deafness of the would-be customer, the talk lasted quite ten minutes. When the manager turned to reenter the bank, the little lady was standing in the doorway. She was so pretty and fascinating that no wonder he saw her across the pavement, held the door open for her, and remained half a minute or so staring after the carriage, which was bowling along at a great pace.

"I knew what to do, and I drove back to Hammersmith, the old gentleman, who had lost his paralysis in a surprisingly rapid fashion, alighting in a quiet street accompanied by the lady.

"When the manager went to his cash-drawer, he must have had a horrible shock to find it cleared of its contents. The lady was an expert, and, while he was outside arranging with her 'father,' she, who had been invited to a seat in the manager's private room, did the trick. Of course, the job had been 'readied' by Shinburn, who made sure that during the dinner-hour there could only be one clerk at the counter and the manager on the premises. The charming little lady did the rest.

"This was a trick which could not be played very often. Still, by using a different conveyance each time and by varying the personages, the lady being sometimes the invalid, at least three coups were successful.

"Shinburn himself, as is well known, came finally to a bad end."

LATEST ISSUES

THE TIP TOP WEEKLY

The most popular publication for boys. The adventures of Frank and Dick Merriwell can be had only in this weekly.

HIGH ART COLORED COVERS. 32 BIG PAGES. PRICE 5 CENTS.

600—Frank Merriwell's Annoyance; or, Reckless Ralph, the Runaway.
601—Frank Merriwell's Restraint; or, The Revenge of a Redskin.
602—Dick Merriwell Held Back; or, Secret Enemies at Work.
603—Dick Merriwell in the Line; or, Given a Show at Last.
604—Dick Merriwell's Drop Kick; or, Winning on a Last Resort.
605—Frank Merriwell's Air Voyage; or, The Wreck of the "California Arrow."
606—Frank Merriwell's Auto Chase; or, The White Deer of Dead River.
607—Frank Merriwell's Captive; or, The End of the Chase.
608—Dick Merriwell's Value; or, The Game That Settled the Question.
609—Dick Merriwell Doped; or, The Mystery of the Black Star.

THE NICK CARTER WEEKLY

The best detective stories on earth. Nick Carter's exploits are read the world over.

HIGH ART COLORED COVERS. 32 BIG PAGES. PRICE 5 CENTS.

563—The Great Spy System; or, Nick Carter's Promise to the President.
564—The Last of Mustushima; or, Nick Carter's Narrowest Escape.
565—Secret of a Haunted House; or, Nick Carter's Fight With a Ghost.
566—A Mystery in India Ink; or, Nick Carter in Search of a Secret.
567—The Plot of the Stantons; or Nick Carter Prevents the Theft of a Fortune.
568—The Criminal Trust; or, Nick Carter's Mysterious Client.
569—The Syndicate of Crooks; or, Nick Carter's Great Prison Plot.
570—The Order of the Python; or, Nick Carter Works the Third Degree.
571—Tried For His Life; or, Patsy's Terrible Ordeal.
572—A Bargain With a Thief; or, Nick Carter's Wildest Chase.

THE DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

The heroes of the stories published in this weekly are dear to the hearts of 60,000 boys. Diamond Dick is a splendid Western character.

HIGH ART COLORED COVERS. 32 BIG PAGES. PRICE 5 CENTS.

576—Diamond Dick's Hardest Ride; or, The Mazeppa of the Sierras.
577—Diamond Dick's Secret Play; or, The "Sarpint" in a New Role.
578—Diamond Dick's Hazard; or, The Marked Man of "Little Bird."
579—Diamond Dick Hand-to-Hand; or, A Test of Courage in the Dark.
580—Diamond Dick's Vendetta; or, The Duel in Death Valley.
581—Diamond Dick's Friendly Foe; or, What the Mad Horse Did.
582—Diamond Dick's Desert Pard; or, Jack Sinn's Last Shot.
583—Diamond Dick's Queer Debtor; or, The Skeleton Horseman's Penance.
584—Diamond Dick's Judgment; or, Two Cowboys and Poker Nell.
585—Diamond Dick's New Pard; or, The Boy Tenderfoot From Iowa.

For sale by all newsdealers, or will be sent to any address on receipt of price, 5 cents per copy, in money or postage stamps, by

STREET & SMITH Publishers 79-89 SEVENTH AVE., N. Y.

IF YOU WANT ANY BACK NUMBERS

of our Weeklies and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Fill out the following Order Blank and send it to us with the price of the weeklies you want and we will send them to you by return mail. POSTAGE STAMPS TAKEN THE SAME AS MONEY.

.....

STREET & SMITH, 79 Seventh Ave., New York. 190

Dear Sirs:—Enclosed please find.....cents for which send me:

.....copies of TIP TOP WEEKLY.....

..... " " NICK CARTER WEEKLY.....

..... " " DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY.....

..... " " BUFFALO BILL STORIES.....

..... " " BRAVE AND BOLD WEEKLY.....

Name.....Street.....City.....State.....

THE NICK CARTER WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY. **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

No other detective stories are half as interesting as those that appear in this publication. Nick Carter has been all over the world and has had experience with all kinds of criminals.

That's why, boys, his adventures holds one's interest from cover to cover. There is no brutality in Nick's make-up—he does not need it—he uses his wits. Do not fail to get the latest numbers from your newsdealer.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

542—Black Madge's Hobo Gang; or, Nick Carter and the Yeggman Queen.
543—Black Madge's Vengeance; or, Nick Carter's Crafty Foe.
544—A Tragedy of the Footlights; or, Nick Carter and the Temple of Vice.
545—The Maynard Woman's Double; or, Patsy's Terrific Brain Storm.
546—Three Against Fifteen; or, Patsy's Splendid Courage.
547—A Mystery of Two Passengers; or, Nick Carter Prevents a Great Crime.
548—A Dead Man at the Feast; or, Nick Carter's Very Slender Clue.
549—The House of Secrets; or, Nick Carter's Midnight Vigil.
550—The Lost Bank President; or, Nick Carter Takes a Great Big Chance.
551—Ralph Bolton's Double Plot; or, Nick Carter's Three Assistants at Work.
552—The Dare-devil Crook; or, Nick Carter Finds a Promising Clue.
553—A Mystery From the Klondyke; or, Nick Carter's Double-headed Case.
554—Returned From the Grave; or, Nick Carter's Legally Dead Client.
555—The Mystery Man of 7-Up Ranch; or, Nick Carter Against the "Brown Chet" Outfit.
556—A Bad Man of Montana; or, Nick Carter's Chase of an Outlaw.
557—The Man From Arizona; or, Nick Carter Swims to Victory.
558—Kid Curry's Last Stand; or, Nick Carter in Dangerous Surroundings.
559—A Beautiful Anarchist; or, Nick Carter's Bravest Act.
560—The Nihilist's Second Move; or, Nick Carter's Timely Interference.
561—The Brotherhood of Free Russia; or, Nick Carter's Beautiful Friend, Olga.
562—A White House Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Case For The President.
563—The Great Spy System; or, Nick Carter's Promise to the President.
564—The Last of Mustushimi; or, Nick Carter's Narrowest Escape.
565—Secrets of a Haunted House; or, Nick Carter's Fight With a Ghost.
566—A Mystery in India Ink; or, Nick Carter in Search of a Secret.
567—The Plot of the Stantons; or, Nick Carter Prevents the Theft of a Fortune.
568—The Criminal Trust; or, Nick Carter's Mysterious Client.
569—A Syndicate of Crooks; or, Nick Carter's Great Prison Plot.
570—The Order of the Python; or, Nick Carter Works the Third Degree.
571—Tried For His Life; or, Patsy's Terrible Ordeal.

If you want any back numbers of this publication and cannot procure them from your newsdealer, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.